south to south JUST TRANSITIONS

CLIMATE Strategies

Policy Brief

Finance, Skills, Trust: Unlocking South Africa's Just Energy Future

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Executive Summary

South Africa's just transition is a national economic and social transformation agenda anchored in climate action and energy reform, with an explicit commitment to fairness, inclusion and redress. In practice, "just" is understood in both distributional terms (who benefits and who bears costs) and procedural terms (who participates and has influence). This approach has been codified through national instruments, including the Just Transition Framework and the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP), supported by governance arrangements that combine the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)'s convening and advisory functions with the mandates of line departments, implementing agencies and finance institutions.[5]

Progress to date is clearest in the energy transition, where power sector reforms and mechanisms to build an investable pipeline are increasingly in place. South Africa has also begun to develop practical channels for investor engagement and project preparation, alongside an emerging ecosystem of accelerators and transaction support.[6] On skills and workforce transition, recent work has clarified both the scale of the opportunity and the risks of fragmented initiatives that are weakly linked to labour demand, workplace experience and job placement.[7] Competitiveness and cost pressures are also accelerating action by firms and public entities on renewable procurement, wheeling and energy efficiency.[28] [29] [30] [31]

The decisive test, however, is delivery at scale under real-world constraints. Four binding constraints stand out. First, the transition finance requirement remains materially larger than mobilisation to date, and the challenge is not only volume but the availability of lower-cost, longer-tenor, well-structured finance that can crowd in investment while protecting affordability and fiscal space. [5] [9] Second, delivery frictions in project preparation, approvals and procurement continue to slow implementation and raise transaction costs, including weaknesses in project preparation quality, sequencing and permitting, procurement and contracting capability and coordination across institutions that must act in concert. [4] [11] Third, skills and employment pathways require a more coordinated, system-led approach that connects training provision to employer demand, workplace learning and placement, with particular attention to place-based transition risks in coal-affected regions. [7] [12] Fourth, legitimacy is a delivery condition: without trusted data, transparent finance tracking and credible evidence that benefits are real and fairly distributed, implementation will remain vulnerable to contestation. [5] [9] Where early transition interventions do not deliver visible local benefits

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or are experienced as procedurally unfair, or where institutional roles and mandates overlap, contestation can intensify and delay implementation even when finance and technical solutions exist.[26] [32] [33]

Top 3 recommendations for international actors:

1. Shift from headline commitments to delivery-grade finance and transaction support. Expand concessional finance and guarantees that lower the cost of capital for priority investments, while funding robust project preparation and transaction support that accelerates bankable pipelines to financial close and implementation.[5] [6]
2. Back coordinated skills and labour transition pathways aligned to national priorities. Support the Just Energy Transition Skills and Employment Pathways (JET-SEP) agenda through coordinated investment that links training to workplace experience and placements, strengthens recognition of prior learning and uses Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community Education and Training (CET) institutions as scalable delivery platforms, with clear outcome metrics and inclusion targets.[7]
3. Strengthen delivery capability and the "standard of proof". Invest in subnational readiness and implementation capability (planning, packaging, procurement and contract management), and strengthen monitoring, reporting and open public data systems that enable transparency, accountability and course correction on both investment and justice outcomes. [6] [11] [5] [9] Use multilateral cooperation, including the UNFCCC Just Transition Work Programme, to accelerate implementation learning and reduce avoidable standards-related frictions that raise compliance costs for green market access.[13]

Over the next 12–18 months, success should be judged less by new commitments and more by measurable delivery signals: faster pipeline conversion to bankable projects, demonstrable reductions in transaction delays, stronger placement-linked skills outcomes and credible public reporting that builds trust and maintains the social licence for implementation. [6] [7] [11] [5]

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South Africa Snapshot

Transition finance gap	Estimates exceeding USD 100 billion over the coming decade; JET Partnership launched at COP26 with USD 8.5 billion pledged.[5]
JET pipeline and mobilisation	JET Funding Platform (as reported in the Climate Summit outcomes report): around USD 800 million in grant commitments recorded; 26 projects registered; R70.6 million mobilised to date.[6]
Delivery priorities flagged by stakeholders	The PCC concluded its inaugural term in December 2025 and has been reconstituted under the Climate Change Act (Act 22 of 2024), with the new Commission in place from 1 January 2026.
Broader Just Transition Considerations	Strengthen municipal technical capacity for climate planning, infrastructure readiness, procurement and contract management; scale public private partnerships for water, stormwater, grid capacity and resilient transport.[6]
Skills system 'quick wins' proposed	Fast-track solar skills; coal worker reskilling and upskilling; expand bridging and recognition of prior learning; mobilise Community Education and Training and TVET hubs; scale climate-care jobs through the Expanded Public Works Programme and Community Works Programme.[7]
Subnational hotspot	Coal job losses are expected to be concentrated in Mpumalanga, while new green jobs may not be created in the same geography, strengthening the case for place-based skills and diversification strategies.[7] [12]

Introduction

How South Africa defines or understands a just transition

South Africa's just transition framing applies a fairness lens to structural economic change, recognising that the costs and benefits of transition must be managed deliberately in a country marked by deep inequality and spatial exclusion. In practice, "just" is understood in both distributional terms (who benefits and who bears costs) and procedural terms (who participates in decisions and has influence), with an emphasis on protecting vulnerable workers and communities while enabling new opportunities. This framing has been codified through national instruments, notably South Africa's Just Transition Framework (2021) and the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) (2023), supported by the convening and policy-shaping role of the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC)[5].

Why a just transition is important in South Africa

South Africa faces a dual imperative: accelerating decarbonisation and resilience-building while achieving inclusive development outcomes, particularly employment, poverty reduction and inequality reduction. These socio-economic conditions shape political feasibility and social legitimacy, making visible fairness and credible delivery central to sustaining momentum. The scale of the transition also creates a material feasibility challenge. The PCC estimates that financing needs exceed USD 100 billion over the coming decade5, underlining the risk of failure if the finance gap is not closed and if governance, skills and implementation constraints are not addressed in parallel.

Alongside domestic commitments, transition momentum is being shaped by competitiveness and cost pressures. Trade partners are tightening carbon-related market access requirements, including through the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which already requires reporting of embedded emissions and is expected to move towards financial adjustment, increasing the commercial risk of delayed industrial decarbonisation and weak emissions data systems. In parallel, high and rising electricity costs and continuing security-of-supply concerns are accelerating action by firms and public entities on self-generation and renewable procurement, including wheeling arrangements, as well as energy efficiency. These drivers can reinforce pace, but they also sharpen distributional choices, making affordability, fairness and visible delivery central to sustaining political support. [28] [30] [34] [35] [36]

Sectors where just transitions are being implemented or planned

Active implementation is concentrated in the energy transition system, including power sector reforms and the development of an investable project pipeline through mechanisms such as the JET Funding Platform. Beyond energy, South Africa is positioning for clean industrial and trade-linked opportunities where investment appetite exists, but delivery barriers remain binding.[6] [11]

- Being implemented now (most advanced):
- Energy transition, centred on electricity system reform and an investable project pipeline, including blended finance mechanisms and project preparation support.
- Being planned or at early-stage implementation (emerging, dependent on delivery enablers):
- Industrial decarbonisation and green industrial development linked to competitiveness, investment and trade dynamics
- Green fuels and associated industrial opportunities, including hydrogen derivatives and sustainable aviation fuels
- Enabling systems required for scale, including infrastructure, standards, skills systems and project preparation capacity

National Just Transition Goals

South Africa's national just transition goals can be summarised as follows.[5] [15] [16] [17]

- Enable a managed energy transition that reduces emissions while maintaining energy security, addressing energy poverty and universal access.
- Protect workers and communities affected by structural shifts, notably in coal value chains, through social protection, skills and employment pathways and place-based economic diversification.
- Use the transition to drive inclusive industrial development, crowding in investment and strengthening competitive low carbon industries.
- Mobilise delivery-grade transition finance at the scale required, including concessional and de-risking instruments and strengthen project preparation so pipelines translate into implementation.
- Strengthen accountability and public trust through credible institutions, transparent finance tracking and evidence of tangible benefits and fairness.
- These goals reflect South Africa's policy architecture for a just transition, including the Just Transition Framework and the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan and the emphasis on credible delivery and legitimacy.[5] [15] [16] [17]

Efforts to Date

Governance and institutional arrangements

South Africa has strengthened just transition governance by formalising the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) as a statutory public entity under the Climate Change Act (2024).[5] [37] This supports a standing platform for cross-constituency advice and social dialogue on contested transition choices. Delivery accountability, however, sits across line departments, state-owned entities, regulators and finance institutions, so effective coordination depends on clear role division, predictable decision processes and credible reporting.[32] [33] South Africa is also connected to international peer networks on climate governance, supporting learning and credibility.[38]

Work on policies and measures is also advancing, including:

- continued electricity sector reform, including Eskom separation steps[27] and related licensing and market arrangements for the transmission and system operation functions;
- operationalisation of the Climate Change Act mitigation system, including the move towards mandatory carbon budgets and mitigation plans for covered entities;
- ongoing refinement of carbon pricing design and regulations, including the proposed interaction between mandatory carbon budgets and the carbon tax as Phase 2 reforms take effect from 2026.

Finance mobilisation and project pipeline development

South Africa is strengthening the link between project pipelines and finance mobilisation, with the JET Funding Platform providing a focal point for project preparation and investor engagement. This is part of a wider effort to build practical delivery systems that help projects move from concept through preparation to financing and implementation.

The JET PMU in the Presidency has established public coordination tools, including quarterly reporting against

the JET Implementation Plan, a JET Grants Register and the development of a wider JET Investments Register.[18] [20] The Funding Platform functions as a matchmaking mechanism designed to link grant funders to JET-aligned projects and support originators to become "grant-ready". Pipeline building is also being driven through portfolio leadership arrangements in lead institutions and through place-based implementation, with Mpumalanga providing a concrete example of provincial coordination and pipeline development, including a developing project register aligned to the national monitoring, evaluation and learning system. [18] [19] Complementary accelerators and transaction support mechanisms are helping improve pre-investment readiness. [21] [22] [23] [24] While these steps mark progress, overall mobilisation remains far below what is required, reinforcing the shift from pilot activity to scalable, delivery-grade finance and transaction support, supported by transparent tracking to build confidence.[5] [6]

Skills, employment pathways and collaboration efforts

Skills and workforce transition capacity is emerging as a binding delivery constraint, with evidence that funding and initiatives are fragmented and not consistently aligned to national or sector priorities.[7] Priorities include faster deployment of transition-relevant skills, stronger bridging and recognition of prior learning (RPL) pathways and more effective use of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community Education and Training (CET) institutions as scalable delivery platforms.[7] Public employment mechanisms may also play a role in scaling transition-related work where appropriate.[7] The core implication for international partners is to coordinate support, avoid duplication and invest in system strengthening that enables scale. Building on the enabling systems and delivery efforts described above, Section 6 identifies where international actors can add practical value and the first South African counterparts to engage to align support and avoid duplication.

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Challenges and Barriers

The evidence base points to four clusters of challenges that constrain delivery and investment at pace and scale.[4] These constraints are mutually reinforcing, which is why progress in one area has not yet translated into a step-change in implementation.[4] Taken together, they define the focus for international support: the package in Section 6 is structured to address the finance gap, reduce delivery frictions, strengthen skills and employment pathways and reinforce accountability and legitimacy.[5] [7] [11] [9]

Scale and affordability: the financing gap

Categorisation: Influenced by External/ Global Dynamics[1]

The scale of South Africa's transition requirement remains materially larger than current mobilisation, with the financing gap widely characterised as very large over the coming decade.[5] While pipeline formation and early mobilisation mechanisms are improving, the central constraint is not only "more finance" but cheaper, longer-tenor and better-structured capital that can crowd in investment at scale while protecting affordability and fiscal space.[5] [9] Competitiveness pressures are also rising. Market access measures such as the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) can increase the effective cost of carbon-intensive exports, while higher electricity tariffs and the continuing imperative of reliable supply are strengthening incentives for private and public actors to invest in renewables, grid access solutions and energy efficiency.[28] [30] [34]

Delivery frictions in investment and project cycles

Categorisation: Primarily Domestic[1]

Investment diagnostics and stakeholder feedback point to practical frictions that slow delivery, raise transaction costs and increase perceived risk, even where demand and capital exist.[11] [4] These frictions span project preparation quality, sequencing and permitting, procurement and contracting capability and weak coordination across institutions that must act in concert.[11] The result is delay and uncertainty that undermines both public delivery and private investment appetite.

Skills system alignment and place-based transition risks, including justice risks

Categorisation: Primarily Domestic (with Global Influence)[1]

Skills and workforce transition capacity is a binding delivery constraint, with evidence of fragmented initiatives and funding flows that are not consistently aligned to national and sector priorities or to labour demand.[7] Transition impacts are also place-based, with risks of concentrated job losses and uneven distribution of new opportunities across regions, firms and communities.[7] Justice risks become acute when benefits accrue to those already better positioned while affected workers and local economies face slow or uncertain alternatives.[10]

Accountability and legitimacy for a people-centred transition

Categorisation: Primarily Domestic[1]

Delivery will not be sustained without legitimacy. In a context of high inequality and contested distributional choices, trust depends on transparent decision-making, credible finance tracking and evidence that benefits are real and fairly distributed.[5] [9] Some civil society and research actors frame just transition accountability as testing whether the transition is adequately resourced to deliver fair socio-economic outcomes in practice, not only whether funds are tracked, including income security and reduced energy poverty.[9] Weak accountability systems, inconsistent

data and perceived integrity risks can erode support, particularly where transition finance and procurement are involved.[9] Political economy factors also shape legitimacy and the practical pace of reform. Early transition pilots, including Komati[26], and high-profile delivery failures can harden scepticism and be mobilised in public debate, particularly where affected workers and communities perceive limited tangible benefit.[26] In addition, where institutional mandates are seen to overlap, or where key decisions are perceived as occurring without clear accountability, trust can erode even when formal governance reforms are in place. These dynamics reinforce the importance of role clarity, transparent decision trails and demonstrable delivery outcomes. Incumbent interests and concentrated influence in emissions-intensive value chains can shape policy signals and investment incentives, underscoring the importance of transparency, predictable rules and accountability for transition commitments and outcomes.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

This section highlights practices that have strengthened South Africa's just transition approach and offer transferable lessons for accelerating delivery while sustaining legitimacy. They reflect learning-by-doing within South Africa, complemented by targeted peer learning. In addition to governance and coordination practices, South Africa has also tested specific implementation approaches that aim to deepen participation and strengthen place-based delivery.

Institutionalisation of climate and just transition governance

Formalising the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) under the Climate Change Act has strengthened institutional certainty and created a standing platform for cross-constituency advice and social dialogue.[5] This continuity matters as the transition shifts from planning into delivery and choices become more contested. **Transferable lesson**: anchor just transition

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governance in a durable institutional mandate that can convene, arbitrate evidence and sustain dialogue across constituencies.

Transparency and participation as delivery enablers

South Africa has treated transparency and participation as practical delivery enablers, not only as governance principles.[5] Open processes can reduce contestation risk and strengthen the credibility of trade-offs required for implementation at scale.[9]
Transferable lesson: build legitimacy deliberately through transparent processes, participation and credible evidence, particularly where distributional impacts are politically and socially sensitive.

Coordination-first approaches to skills transition

Evidence on skills and employment pathways points to coordination as the central performance driver, with higher impact when actors, funding and delivery platforms align around employer-linked pathways rather than stand-alone training activity.[7]
Transferable lesson: prioritise system alignment and delivery platforms (for example TVET and CET), with clear links to labour demand, job placement and recognition of prior learning, rather than fragmented projects.[7]

Innovative approaches: social ownership and bottom-up project origination

The PCC has helped advance practical approaches intended to make the transition more visibly people-centred. This includes exploratory work on social ownership models, which consider how renewable energy can be collectively owned to reduce inequality and build community wealth.[5]
In Mpumalanga province, the PCC's Partnership Implementation Model (PIM) has been positioned as a mechanism for bottom-up project origination, using consultation and feasibility work to co-create a pipeline of just transition projects and strengthen local accountability and community governance in implementation.[5]
Transferable lesson: where legitimacy and distributional impacts are central, use implementation models that embed community participation in ownership, governance and project selection, rather than treating these as add-ons.

Cross-country learning and domestic learning-by-doing informing South Africa's next phase

South Africa is increasingly using structured peer learning to complement domestic experience, including engagement with international networks.[14] The UNFCCC just transition work programme provides a formal frame for this work, with an emphasis on practical implementation and international cooperation.[13]
Transferable lesson: use peer learning to strengthen delivery practice but retain a clear fit-for-context discipline rather than importing models wholesale.

Gaps and Opportunities for International Support

This section sets out priority areas where international actors can add practical value to South Africa's just transition by targeting binding constraints that limit delivery at pace and scale. It focuses on finance, skills, subnational delivery, accountability and the removal of implementation bottlenecks.

Finance: move from "headline pledges" to delivery instruments

Gap. The scale of South Africa's transition finance requirement relative to current mobilisation remains the dominant constraint, with a large gap between

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estimated needs and pledged or mobilised resources.[5] While pipeline formation and early mobilisation mechanisms are improving, the challenge is not only "more finance" but cheaper, longer-tenor and better-structured capital that can crowd in investment while protecting affordability and fiscal space.[5] [9]

Priority actions for international actors. Prioritise instruments that convert commitments into implementable, measurable delivery:

- Expand concessional finance and guarantee instruments that materially lower the cost of capital, linked to a transparent results framework that includes justice outcomes.[5]
- Fund robust project preparation facilities and transaction support to accelerate bankable pipelines, aligned to the JET Funding Platform pipeline logic.[6]
- Support transparent climate finance tracking and reporting to strengthen accountability and legitimacy.[5] [9]

Primary SA entry points: JET Project Management Unit (Presidency) for JET IP delivery coordination, the JET Funding Platform and finance tracking registers; National Treasury (including public finance and guarantee-related instruments); Development Bank of Southern Africa (blended finance, transaction support and preparation); Industrial Development Corporation for sector-linked industrial financing (where relevant to NEVs, green manufacturing and localisation). For project preparation and transaction support, Infrastructure South Africa in the Presidency is a practical entry point for strengthening preparation standards and addressing delivery bottlenecks, and the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (National Treasury) is relevant where procurement and contracting support is included.

Annex B reflects this section as two linked actions: (i) delivery instruments for blended finance and guarantees and (ii) project preparation and transaction support aligned to the JET pipeline.

Skills and labour transition: back the Just Energy Transition Skills and Employment Pathways (JET-SEP) with coordinated investment

Gap. Skills and workforce transition capacity is a binding delivery constraint, with evidence that funding and initiatives are fragmented and not consistently aligned to national priorities or labour demand.[7] Weak links between training, workplace experience and placement reduce impact and can undermine social credibility in affected regions.[7]

Priority actions for international actors. Back coordinated pathways rather than stand-alone training activity:

- Align support to the Just Energy Transition Skills and Employment Pathways (JET-SEP) agenda, with shared outcome metrics and inclusion targets.[7]
- Co-fund employer-linked pathways that combine training with workplace experience and job matching, including bridging and recognition of prior learning (RPL).[7]
- Strengthen scalable delivery platforms, including TVET and CET institutions, and support coordination mechanisms that reduce duplication across initiatives and funders.[7]

Primary SA entry points: Department of Higher Education and Training (TVET, CET and system coordination); NBI-led JET-SEP coordination node (private-sector mobilisation aligned to the JET skilling plan); Department of Employment and Labour and NEDLAC for labour-market alignment and social partner engagement; priority SETAs and TVET/CET delivery partners in affected regions (to anchor demand-led pathways, workplace learning and RPL).

Subnational delivery: strengthen municipal and place-based implementation

Gap. Delivery capability at subnational level is a practical constraint for transition-related investment and climate-resilient infrastructure, particularly where municipalities lack capacity for planning, project packaging, procurement and contract management.[6] Without this readiness, national ambitions and finance commitments struggle to translate into implementation.[6]

Priority actions for international actors. Focus support on delivery systems that enable pace and credibility:

- Provide embedded technical assistance for municipal planning, project packaging, procurement and contract management, targeted to priority regions and metros.[6]
- Use performance-linked grants and co-financing to improve infrastructure readiness and accelerate implementable pipelines, including enabling investments that unlock private investment where appropriate.[6]
- Support scalable approaches to public private partnerships and municipal financing that protect affordability and equity outcomes.
- Support credible, scalable energy efficiency programmes at municipal and metro level (including public building retrofits and municipal services), using transparent baselines and verification so verified savings translate into lower electricity consumption and operating-cost relief, improving municipal fiscal space.[39] [40]

Primary SA entry points: JET PMU municipal portfolio and South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (municipal readiness, standard approaches and peer learning); Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (local government systems and enabling frameworks); National Treasury (municipal finance, performance-linked grant design and fiscal guardrails); priority metros and place-based structures in affected regions, including Mpumalanga coordination (JTCC) and MGCA.

Governance, accountability and data: strengthen the "standard of proof"

Gap. Delivery will not be sustained without legitimacy. Trust depends on transparent decision-making, credible finance tracking and evidence that benefits are real and fairly distributed, particularly in a context of high inequality and contested distributional

choices.[5] [9]

Priority actions for international actors. Invest in systems that enable transparency and course correction:

- Support operational finance tracking and routine public reporting that enables oversight and confidence in finance flows and outcomes.[5] [9]
- Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning, including justice-aligned indicators and practical reporting that supports decision-making and corrective action.[5] [9]
- Fund independent research and learning partnerships that improve the evidence base on what works, for whom and where.[9]

Primary SA entry points: JET PMU (monitoring, evaluation and learning; quarterly reporting; JET Grants Register and emerging Investment Register); Presidential Climate Commission (independent convening, legitimacy and evidence agenda); National Treasury (public finance transparency, reporting coherence and affordability considerations); Auditor-General of South Africa and other oversight bodies where transparency and integrity assurance mechanisms are being strengthened.

Implementation bottlenecks and integrity: unblock project cycles and reduce risk

Gap. Investment diagnostics and stakeholder feedback highlight practical frictions that slow delivery and increase perceived risk, including project preparation quality, sequencing and permitting, procurement and contracting capability and weak coordination across institutions that must act in concert.[11] [4] Integrity risks and weak transparency can further erode confidence where transition finance and procurement are involved.[9] [11]

Priority actions for international actors. Combine targeted technical assistance and integrity safeguards with enabling support:

- Streamline administrative and permitting bottlenecks for priority investments, with transparent decision trails and integrity safeguards.[11]
- Strengthen procurement and contract management capability and transparency to reduce integrity risk and improve value for money.[9] [11]
- Support regulator-to-regulator cooperation on predictable processes for grid access and municipal wheeling,

Photo credit: Andile M[illegible]a–a Unspla[illegible]

reducing uncertainty for investment.[11]
- Back enabling upgrades that reduce systemic delivery risk, while ensuring affordability and equity impacts are assessed and managed as part of investment readiness.[11]
- Where energy efficiency programmes are supported, prioritise integrity-by-design delivery models (clear baselines, measurement and verification, transparent contracting and publication of results) to protect credibility and avoid waste.[39] [40] [41]
- Where relevant, align standards, market access and investment facilitation with domestic industrial decarbonisation priorities, focusing on practical barriers rather than additional commitments.[11]
- Where localisation requirements apply, support capability building and partnership-based supplier development (including quality and standards support), so localisation objectives are met without avoidable cost increases, procurement delays or delivery risk.[25]

Primary SA entry points: National Treasury's Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (procurement capability, standardisation and transparency); Infrastructure South Africa in the Presidency (project preparation support, appraisal standards and business-case quality); relevant permitting and authorisation authorities for priority investments (sector departments and environmental authorities, as applicable); system regulators and network operators where the bottleneck is connection and access, notably National Energy Regulator for South Africa (NERSA) and Eskom, alongside municipal distributors and SALGA for municipal wheeling and standard agreements.

Multilateral cooperation: use the UNFCCC Just Transition Work Programme to accelerate implementation and reduce avoidable frictions

Gap. South Africa's constraints on finance, skills, subnational delivery and accountability are shared by many developing countries. While the UNFCCC's United Arab Emirates Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) provides a formal platform to discuss just transition pathways and international support, it will add most value if it focuses on practical implementation learning and helps reduce unnecessary transaction costs arising from fragmented approaches to standards, measurement and reporting in emerging green markets. In practical terms, this can include structured joint problem-solving and demonstration workstreams that test delivery approaches in context and generate reusable tools that reduce transaction costs before scaling.[13]

Priority actions for international actors. Use South Africa's engagement in the JTWP to shift from general principles to implementable support:
- Prioritise implementation knowledge-sharing through the JTWP, focused on what works in practice on delivery systems (project preparation, blended finance structures, skills pathways, social dialogue, place-based implementation and justice-aligned indicators).[13]
- Strengthen coherence across climate-related requirements by promoting common approaches where possible to measurement, reporting and verification, product emissions accounting and transition planning and by supporting mutual learning on conformity assessment and data systems, so developing countries face fewer duplicative compliance burdens when accessing green markets.[5] [13]
- Link dialogue to means of implementation, including technical assistance and capacity building that enables countries to meet requirements while maintaining social protection, affordability and equity outcomes in domestic implementation.[13]
- Establish time-bound joint problem-solving and demonstration workstreams, linked to priority pipelines, to test and refine delivery approaches in context (for example grid and municipal delivery models, project preparation tools, skills delivery pathways and approaches to product and transition-related reporting), with clear scaling routes and open publication of learning products.[25]

Primary SA entry points: Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (UNFCCC lead and JTWP engagement); DIRCO for negotiation coordination and international positioning; JET PMU and portfolio leads for practical implementation learning and "means of implementation" translation; Presidential Climate Commission for convening, learning partnerships and coherence across justice-aligned indicators and reporting expectations.
Workstreams should be anchored to the Primary SA entry points, avoid creating parallel structures and be designed with an explicit route to adoption in existing programmes and reporting systems.

International actors action matrix – Annex B
A detailed action matrix, including lead actors, instruments, mechanisms, indicative timing and suggested success metrics, is provided in Annex B to support coordination between South African stakeholders and international partners.

Conclusion

South Africa has strengthened its institutional basis for a just transition, notably through the formalisation of the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) as a statutory entity and has advanced transition planning and pipeline development. The decisive test is delivery at scale under real-world constraints, including closing the transition finance gap, reducing implementation frictions and building coordinated skills and employment pathways that are credible to workers and communities.[5] [7] [11] [9]

Urgent next steps (South Africa-led, internationally supported)

- Finance: Move from headline pledges to delivery instruments that lower the cost of capital, expand concessional and guarantee instruments and accelerate project preparation and pipeline execution.
- Skills and labour transition: Back JET-SEP with coordinated investment that links training to workplace experience and placements, reduces fragmentation across initiatives and strengthens system capacity for scale.
- Accountability, data and learning: Strengthen the "standard of proof" through credible monitoring and reporting on both investment and justice outcomes, enabling transparency and course correction.

Big takeaways for the international debate

- Delivery at scale hinges on targeted support to binding constraints. International actors add most value when finance, technical assistance and learning are aligned to implementation realities rather than additional high-level commitments.
- Just transition support must integrate fairness and inclusion into investment readiness and decision-making. Accountability for finance flows and outcomes is central to legitimacy and feasibility.
- Place-based implementation capacity matters. Without capable subnational delivery and practical measures to reduce project-cycle delays, even well-designed national plans will struggle to translate into results.

Annexes

Annex A. Fact Pack (South Africa: just transition)

TOPIC	Key facts of South Africa's: just transition
Governance and legitimacy	• PCC completing first term (2020–2025) and transitioning to statutory establishment as a Schedule 3 public entity under the Climate Change Act (Act 22 of 2024) from 1 January 2026. Governance of just transition delivery is distributed across line departments, regulators, Eskom and finance institutions, making role clarity, predictable decision processes and credible reporting important to sustain legitimacy. • Transparency practice: PCC has emphasised open governance, including public-facing engagement processes. • International engagement: PCC elected as first Global South Co-Chair of the International Climate Councils Network (ICCN) for 2025–2027.
Transition finance and scale	• Financing requirement: transition finance needs estimated to exceed USD 100 billion over the coming decade. • JET Partnership pledge: USD 8.5 billion pledged at COP26 under the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP). • Finance governance and accountability: civil society commentary highlights the importance of transparent tracking of finance flows and outcomes to sustain legitimacy.
JET pipeline and mobilisation channels	• JET Funding Platform (pipeline and mobilisation): USD 800 million grant finance pledged; 26 projects registered; ZAR 70.6 million mobilised to date (as reported). • Investor engagement: regular pitching and matching mechanisms used to connect investable propositions with capital.
Climate finance ecosystem examples	• Ninety One Accelerator (pilot year): reported mobilisation of ZAR 13 million in direct finance • Climate Finance Accelerator: reported matching of entrepreneurs with over ZAR 2 billion in funding (2021–2024).

Skills and employment pathways	• Skills system findings: fragmentation and misalignment of funding and initiatives with priorities and labour demand identified as a constraint. • Priority actions highlighted: recognition of prior learning (RPL); bridging pathways; workplace-based learning; stronger use of TVET and CET institutions as delivery platforms. • Public employment channels referenced: Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and Community Works Programme (CWP) as potential vehicles for scaling transition-related work where appropriate. • Institutional measures proposed: dedicated JET desk within DHET; coordination mechanisms including skills development zones and advisory structures. • Suggested monitoring indicators: Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placements and completions in just transition-linked occupations; Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) uptake (applications, assessments, credits/qualifications) and progression into training or employment; women and youth participation in job-linked pathways and placements (disaggregated by gender, age and region).
Priority sectors and enabling conditions	• Core implementation focus: energy transition and power sector reforms, including development of an investable project pipeline. • Emerging industrial opportunities: industrial decarbonisation and green industrial development linked to competitiveness and trade exposure (including CBAM-related requirements in key markets), alongside green fuels and derivatives. • Materiality note: Sasol's Secunda operations dominate Sasol's emissions profile and are central to South Africa's liquid fuels and petrochemicals value chains, making Secunda's decarbonisation pathway material to national industrial decarbonisation outcomes.[42] [43] • Enablers frequently cited: grid access and expansion; municipal readiness and delivery capability; energy efficiency as a rapid, demand-side lever; standards and regulatory cooperation to reduce delay and uncertainty.

Annex B. International actors action matrix

Purpose and primary users. This matrix is a practical coordination tool for international actors engaging in South Africa's just transition, particularly new staff rotating into JET-related roles. It links priority actions in Section 6 of the policy brief to indicative instruments, delivery mechanisms, timing and success metrics, and identifies the first South African counterparts to engage to align support and avoid duplication.

How to use. Start with the relevant action area (aligned to Sections 6.1–6.6), confirm the Primary SA entry points, then select instruments that fit the constraint being addressed. Where support is already in motion through existing mechanisms, prioritise alignment and reinforcement over creating parallel initiatives. Where mandates span multiple institutions or are politically contested, confirm the accountable authority and reporting line before proposing new coordination structures, reporting products or facilities.

Entry points key. "Primary SA entry points" identifies the first institutions international actors should engage to align, validate needs and avoid duplication before selecting instruments or establishing new facilities.

Note. Annex B separates finance instruments (6.1) from project preparation and transaction support (also 6.1) because both are required to convert commitments into implementable, measurable delivery.

Recommended action	Primary SA entry points	Lead international actor(s)	Instrument	Mechanism	Indicative timing	Suggested success metrics
Policy Brief 6.1 Deliver delivery-grade blended finance and guarantees for priority transition investments	JET PMU (Presidency); National Treasury; DBSA; IDC (industrial portfolios)	JETP partners; MDBs; bilateral DFIs; climate funds	Concessional finance; longer-tenor finance; guarantees; first-loss; grants for public goods	Coordinate through the Primary SA entry points; package concessional finance and risk mitigation around a transparent JET-aligned priority pipeline and results framework; provide transaction support that enables financial close; track affordability, fiscal space and justice outcomes through regular public reporting	0–24 months for pipeline acceleration, then ongoing	Concessional finance committed and disbursed; projects reaching financial close; change in weighted cost of capital for priority projects; guarantee utilisation rate; justice outcome reporting embedded in finance disclosures

Policy Brief 6.1 Deliver delivery-grade blended finance and guarantees for priority transition investments	JET PMU (Presidency); National Treasury; DBSA; IDC (industrial portfolios)	JETP partners; MDBs; bilateral DFIs; climate funds	Concessional finance; longer-tenor finance; guarantees; first-loss; grants for public goods	Coordinate through the Primary SA entry points; package concessional finance and risk mitigation around a transparent JET-aligned priority pipeline and results framework; provide transaction support that enables financial close; track affordability, fiscal space and justice outcomes through regular public reporting	0–24 months for pipeline acceleration, then ongoing	Concessional finance committed and disbursed; projects reaching financial close; change in weighted cost of capital for priority projects; guarantee utilisation rate; justice outcome reporting embedded in finance disclosures
Policy Brief 6.1 Fund and coordinate project preparation and transaction support linked to the JET pipeline	JET PMU (Funding Platform alignment); Infrastructure South Africa; DBSA; National Treasury (Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO) where procurement support is included)	Bilateral donors; MDB trust funds; philanthropic funders; technical assistance facilities	Project preparation facilities; transaction advisory; technical assistance.	Coordinate through the Primary SA entry points; deliver feasibility, permitting, procurement and bankability support using standardised tools and defined decision points; include integrity safeguards and open reporting; ensure clear handover to financiers and implementing agencies	0–18 months to establish, then iterative cycles	Projects prepared to bankable standard; time from concept to financial close; pipeline conversion rate (registration to close); proportion of pipeline with credible implementation plans

Policy Brief 6.2 Skills and labour transition: back JET-SEP with coordinated investment in job-linked pathways	DHET; JET-SEP coordination node (NBI); NEDLAC and DEL; relevant SETAs and priority TVET/ CET institutions in affected regions	Bilateral donors; ILO and multilateral agencies; development partners; skills funders	Results-based grants; technical assistance to skills institutions	Coordinate through DHET and the JET-SEP node; co-fund employer-linked pathways (training plus workplace experience and placement); strengthen RPL and bridging routes; use TVET and CET as scalable delivery platforms; support coordination mechanisms that reduce duplication across funders and initiatives	0–12 months for quick wins; 1–3 years for system strengthening	Work-integrated learning placements and completions (disaggregated by gender, age and region); RPL uptake (applications, assessments, credits/qualifications awarded) and progression into further training or employment; placement and 6–12 month retention outcomes in priority occupations and affected regions; women and youth participation in job-linked pathways and placements (including via place-based platforms such as skills development zones); employer participation (placements hosted); women and youth share of placements

Policy Brief 6.3 Strengthen subnational delivery capacity for climate-resilient infrastructure and transition initiatives	JET PMU (municipal portfolio); SALGA; COGTA; National Treasury; metros and place-based delivery nodes in affected regions (including Mpumalanga JTCC/MGCA where relevant)	Bilateral donors; climate funds; DFIs; city networks	Embedded capacity support; erformance-linked grants; co-financing; support for performance contracting where suitable	Coordinate through the Primary SA entry points; support municipal readiness (planning, investment-ready pipeline development and project packaging, procurement and contract management); finance catalytic, place-based infrastructure where delivery barriers are highest; use performance-linked co-financing where feasible; design scalable PPP and municipal finance solutions that protect affordability and equity, including by testing and scaling community benefit and ownership approaches and local revenue models that strengthen social licence while maintaining affordability protections; include demand-side delivery such as municipal energy efficiency and building retrofit programmes where they offer rapid, verifiable savings and bill relief	0–24 months, then scaling	Municipal readiness scores improved; projects packaged to investment-ready standard; value and number of PPPs progressed; delivery milestones met; contracts awarded for priority projects; service reliability indicators improved; verified energy savings from municipal assets (for example kWh saved and bill reductions) where efficiency programmes are supported

Policy Brief 6.4 Build a national "standard of proof" for just transition outcomes through M&E, justice indicators and public reporting	JET PMU (MEL system and public reporting); National Treasury; Auditor-General of South Africa (and other oversight bodies where relevant); data-owning departments and entities (to align reporting to operational systems); Presidential Climate Commission (where relevant to social dialogue and coherence on justice-aligned indicators)	UN agencies; bilateral donors; research funders; data and accountability initiatives	Grants; technical assistance; data system and platform support	Align through the Primary SA entry points; support finance tracking, reporting cycles and justice indicators aligned to national systems; strengthen data governance and interoperability; enable open reporting that supports oversight and course correction; fund independent learning partnerships that improve decision-use of evidence, without creating parallel reporting systems where routine departmental and Treasury reporting can be strengthened instead.	0–24 months set-up, then recurring reporting cycles	Operational finance tracking system; dashboard operational with routine updates; reporting published to the agreed schedule (for example quarterly); evidence of data use in decisions; improved transparency and trust proxy indicators

Policy Brief 6.5 Unblock implemetation bottlenecks and strengthen integrity and predictable processes for priority transition investments	Infrastructure South Africa (Presidency)- project preparation and bottleneck management); National Treasury OCPO (procurement, contract management and transparency); relevant permitting authorities (sector departments and environmental authorities as applicable); NERSA and Eskom (grid access), with SALGA and municipal distributors for municipal wheeling	Bilateral partners; MDBs and DFIs; TA facilities; governance and anti-corruption programmes; trade and standards cooperation platforms	Technical assistance; capacity support; integrity and compliance support; targeted co-financing for enambilng ifrastructure; regulatory cooperation and standards alignment	Coordinate through the Primary SA entry points; reduce permitting and administrative delays for priority investments with transparent service standards and decision trails; strengthen procurement and contract management transparency; where localisation requirements apply, pair them with supplier development and partnership-based approaches (including quality and standards support) so localisation objectives are met without avoidable cost premiums or procurement delays; support regulator-to-regulator engagement on grid access and municipal wheeling; finance enabling upgrades that reduce systemic delivery risk, with affordability and equity impacts assessed and managed; where energy efficiency programmes are supported, build integrity-by-design delivery models (clear baselines, verification and transparent contracting) to protect credibility and avoid waste; align standards, market access and investment facilitation with domestic industrial decarbonisation priorities, using existing trade and investment cooperation platforms where they add practical value	6–24 months for initial reforms and pilots, then iterative scaling	Reduced permitting and compliance timelines; improved procurement integrity indicators (audit findings, contract transparency, reduced irregular expenditure risks); clearer grid connection and wheeling processes; improved investor confidence measures; increased pipeline conversion from registration to financial close and implementation; local supplier qualification and partnership outcomes achieved without material cost or timetable slippage (for example suppliers meeting required standards, procurement cycle time, cost variance against benchmark); verified savings achieved where energy efficiency delivery is supported (baseline, measurement and verification completed and published)

Policy Brief 6.6 Use the UNFCCC Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) to accelerate implementation learning and reduce avoidable transaction costs from fragmented standards, measurement and reporting.	DFFE (UNFCCC lead and JTWP engagement); DIRCO; JET PMU and portfolio leads (to translate learning into delivery); Presidential Climate Commission (learning partnerships and coherence on justice-aligned indicators).	UNFCCC Parties and JTWP participants; UN agencies; MDBs; bilateral partners; standards and conformity assessment cooperation platforms	Peer learning support; technical assistance; capacity building grants; data system support	Coordinate through the Primary SA entry points; support structured implementation learning exchanges on delivery systems (project preparation, blended finance, skills pathways, social dialogue, place-based delivery and justice-aligned indicators). Establish time-bound joint problem-solving and demonstration workstreams linked to priority pipelines to test approaches in context and produce reusable tools (templates, decision points and guidance notes) that can be adopted through existing programmes and reporting systems. Promote more coherent approaches to measurement, reporting and verification, product emissions accounting and transition planning and strengthen conformity assessment capability and data readiness to reduce duplicative compliance burdens while protecting affordability and equity outcomes	0–12 months to initiate structured workstreams, then iterative cycles aligned to JTWP	Guidance notes agreed and used by delivery partners (with evidence of uptake); learning products produced and used (case packs, tools); reduced duplication in reporting and compliance requirements across supported initiatives; improved readiness to meet priority market requirements (MRV and product-related reporting), including CBAM-related reporting where applicable; evidence of reduced compliance and transaction costs in priority value chains; number of workstreams completed with documented adoption in at least one delivery programme

Sources (evidence base used)

In addition to the documentary sources listed below, the brief draws on non-attributable insights from a small number of semi-structured key informant interviews undertaken by the author with senior stakeholders in South Africa's just energy transition ecosystem. Interviews were used to inform interpretation and to check whether the conclusions and recommendations are implementable in practice, not as a primary evidence base. They were used to test the robustness of key judgements, clarify delivery constraints and test whether recommendations are feasible under current institutional, fiscal and political conditions. Findings were triangulated with the documentary evidence base, including official policy and governance sources and recent synthesis reports.

A. Brief preparation and drafting guidance (internal project documents)

1. Policy Brief Structure Guidance. Proposed structure and length guidance for country policy briefs.
2. Project Overview SA adapted. South Africa brief framing and the focus on international support.
3. KickOff SA12.12.25 (pptx). Project kick-off slides covering brief objectives and structure guidance.
4. Semi-structured key informant interviews (unpublished). Non-attributable interviews undertaken by the author with senior stakeholders in South Africa's just energy transition ecosystem to validate interpretations and refine priority constraints and opportunities for international support.

B. South Africa evidence sources (public reports and reference materials)

5. Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) (2025). PCC 2025 five-year legacy report (pdf). https://pccommissionflo.imgix.net/uploads/images/251031-PCC-legacy-book_Highres.pdf Used for governance evolution, transparency emphasis, international engagement and transition finance scale framing.
6. National Business Initiative (NBI) (2025). South Africa Climate Summit outcomes report (pdf). https://www.nbi.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/South-Africa-Climate-Summit-2025-Outcomes-Report.pdf Used for JET Funding Platform pipeline figures, municipal delivery priorities and climate finance ecosystem examples (including accelerators).
7. Strengthening Skills for a Just Transition: Recommendations to Support Collaboration (pdf). Used for skills system alignment findings, coordination recommendations and proposed quick wins and system measures.
8. Climate Strategies (CS) (S2S) (year as per document). South to South Infographic: Practical Recommendations (pdf). Used as a synthesis companion to the skills collaboration recommendations.
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18. Just Energy Transition Implementation Plan (JET IP) Quarterly Progress Report 31 December 2024 JET Project Management Unit (JET PMU) The Presidency https://justenergytransition.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Just-Energy-Transition-Qaurterly-Progress-Report-31-December-2024.pdf
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