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Equity and Development Considerations of Just Energy Transition Partnerships for Developing Countries

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1 Introduction

THE global imperative to address climate change has catalyzed widespread discourse and action on energy transitions as a key element of effecting just transitions towards low-emission development pathways and decarbonization. This has spurred a proliferation of initiatives aimed at transforming energy systems, particularly in developing countries.

Among the most visible initiatives are the so-called Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), which aim to accelerate decarbonization in developing countries through targeted financial and technical support. These JETPs are high-profile, finance-linked plurilateral arrangements that were framed by their proponents as vehicles to operationalize just transitions by channelling climate finance, de-risking investments, and accelerating energy sector reforms in developing countries. To date, there are four JETPs that have been established (for South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Senegal) for a combined pledged amount of USD46.5 billion.[1]

Framed by developed country donors as innovative mechanisms, JETPs reflect deeper tensions in the international climate regime around equity, sovereignty, and development priorities. These JETPs hence raise questions about equity, justice, and the right to development that go to the heart of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement, including the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) which recognize that countries face vastly different historical responsibilities, capacities, and development needs.

Ultimately, the growing prominence of JETPs signals a larger contest over the future of climate finance and governance. This is a contest between multilateral, equity-oriented approaches that are based on multilaterally

agreed principles and guidelines under the UNFCCC regime, and fragmented, donor-led models of climate finance and other support.

This paper critically examines the equity and development implications of JETPs in light of the principles enshrined in the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, especially CBDR-RC. It assesses whether the operationalization of JETPs upholds or undermines these foundational commitments, and whether the growing prominence of JETPs as flagship models signals a shift away from multilateral, Party-driven approaches towards donor-defined conditionality. By foregrounding perspectives from the Global South and drawing on relevant multilateral decisions, including the Global Stocktake outcomes, this paper examines the extent to which JETPs contribute to or detract from the broader vision of a just, equitable, and development-centred transition.

2 Conceptual Foundations: Just Transitions, Equity, and CBDR-RC

THE discourse on "just transitions", under which the discussion on just energy transitions takes place, has gained prominence in international climate and development debates, yet its conceptual underpinnings and operational applications remain contested particularly from the standpoint of equity and systemic justice.

The notion of a "just transition" originated in the global labour movement as a demand to protect the rights and livelihoods of workers displaced by environmental regulation and industrial restructuring, and subsequently extended into global climate change negotiations.[2] In the UNFCCC context, the concept of "just transition" was first referred to in decision 1/CP.16 in 2010 in the context of the development of a shared vision on long-term cooperative action on climate change. Subsequently, the 10th preambular paragraph of the Paris Agreement took account of "the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities". Decision 1/CMA.3, paragraph 85, recognized the need to ensure transitions that promote sustainable development and eradication of poverty, and the creation of decent work and quality jobs, including through making financial flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development, including through deployment and transfer of technology, and provision of support to developing country Parties. Following years of negotiations pushed by the Group of 77 and China over the reluctance of developed countries, a Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) was established by decision 1/CMA.4 (paragraphs 50–53) in 2022 to discuss just transition pathways to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. The JTWP's modalities were agreed upon in decision 3/CMA.5 in 2023.[3]

At the technical level, the UNFCCC secretariat produced in 2016 a technical paper on the work done under the UNFCCC on a just transition of the workforce in the context of the implementation of response measures.[4] Work in relation to just transition has also been undertaken in the context of the UNFCCC's Katowice Committee of Experts on the Impacts of the Implementation of Response Measures (KCI), which has produced two technical papers relating to just transitions.[5] The International Labour Organization (ILO) has also been active on this issue,[6] and adopted in 2016 its "Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all".[7]

However, narrow technocratic interpretations focused only on labour or energy reforms overlook structural dependencies, fiscal constraints, and inequities faced by developing countries. These risk reproducing colonial patterns of extraction and external control, particularly when they fail to support endogenous industrialization, energy sovereignty, and access to clean technology.

A truly just transition, as contextualized in the development realities of developing countries, must be about expanding development policy space; promoting universal and equitable access to affordable, reliable clean energy; capacity-building for endogenous technology development; fair trade terms; decent work and social protection; and building climate resilience across sectors and populations, including through adaptation, food security, and addressing loss and damage arising from the adverse effects of climate change, not just mitigation. For climate-vulnerable developing countries, the transition must be comprehensive, encompassing efforts to reduce structural inequality and enhance development resilience in the face of worsening climate impacts. Simply replacing fossil fuel dependency with new forms of technological or financial dependency is not a just transition, it is merely a reconfiguration of inequity.

This broader framing aligns with longstanding positions by developing countries in the UNFCCC process which have consistently called for just transition strategies that are integrated with national development planning and grounded in the right to development. The just transition is inseparable from the broader struggle to overcome structural inequality in the global

economic and ecological order. For developing countries, a just transition must be nationally defined and developmentally appropriate. It must go beyond sectoral decarbonization to address deep-rooted inequalities in energy access, technological capacity, and historical patterns of resource extraction and dependency, anchored by the principle of CBDR-RC and focused on achieving the right to development supported by international cooperation on the provision of the means of implementation to developing countries under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement.[8]

In this context, the principle of CBDR-RC is not an abstract ideal but a legally grounded operational framework for delivering climate justice. Article 2.2 of the Paris Agreement explicitly states that implementation of the Agreement will "reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances". Equity in this context entails the recognition that countries have unequal historical responsibilities for the climate crisis, possess differing levels of development, and have vastly divergent capacities to undertake transition measures. This is particularly important given the existence of systemic inequity in the global governance regimes that are closely linked to the just transition concept such as the international trade and climate regimes.[9]

3 Overview of Just Energy Transition Partnerships

JETPs have emerged as a high-profile modality for climate finance and energy cooperation between developed and developing countries and are seen by their developed country proponents as the primary way in which just transitions in developing countries can be undertaken.

First unveiled at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP26) in 2021 with the announcement of the South Africa JETP,[10] these arrangements were heralded as a new model of multilateral cooperation intended to accelerate the phase-out of coal while supporting a "just" transition in emerging economies. The subsequent expansion of JETPs to Indonesia, Vietnam, and Senegal has further entrenched their role as flagship initiatives for developed donor countries, multilateral development banks, and international financial institutions seeking to demonstrate their commitment to global climate goals.

However, beneath their rhetorical appeal lies a contested political economy shaped by deep asymmetries in finance, technology, and governance. JETPs, while nominally constructed as partnerships, have thus far reflected a donor-driven logic where the donor developed countries retain significant influence over the scale, terms, and conditionalities of support. The financial architecture of JETPs is skewed towards loans and private investment, burdening developing countries with debt rather than enabling transformation. From a critical Global South perspective, JETPs raise urgent questions regarding ownership, equity, and the systemic imbalances that continue to characterize global climate finance and energy governance.

Current JETPs tend to prioritize mitigation targets over broader development objectives and often tie finance to policy reforms shaped by the donors and existing dominant policy paradigms. This framing not only sidelines

equitable adaptation, resilience, and socio-economic transformation in developing countries, it also entrenches a narrow mitigation technology- and finance-linked conception of justice that reflects the donors' interests and perspectives on what constitutes climate justice. This is particularly concerning given the asymmetry of power and voice in shaping the terms of these partnerships, which are often established through informal donor-recipient channels that bypass inclusive and Party-driven governance. As currently designed, JETPs risk becoming donor-driven and conditional, failing to deliver equitable, nationally determined transition pathways.

A recurring concern is that JETPs privilege emissions reductions over broader development objectives. While framed as "just" transitions, the actual substance of JETP plans tends to centre on rapid decarbonization targets – particularly coal phase-outs – without equal attention to energy access, adaptation, job creation, or poverty reduction. This narrow focus reflects a persistent mitigation bias within the global climate finance discourse, in which the developmental priorities of developing countries are subordinated to developed country donor-imposed mitigation policy priorities.

Moreover, JETPs risk reinforcing the Global North's rhetorical policy narrative of urgency and discipline with respect to climate change measures without addressing their own continued fossil fuel expansion or historical emissions. Developed countries are responsible for around two-thirds of historical cumulative greenhouse gas emissions (1850–2019),[11] yet JETPs place transition expectations on developing countries without ensuring adequate grant-based finance or technology support to developing countries to undertake the transition. The costed needs reported in nationally determined contributions (NDCs) of developing countries are estimated at USD5.1–6.8 trillion by 2030,[12] but finance pledges under JETPs are often loan-heavy, with minimal grants, reinforcing debt and limiting fiscal policy autonomy.

The emphasis on "de-risking" private capital rather than enabling public-led, developmental transitions raises concerns about justice and sovereignty. Consequently, JETPs risk becoming tools for imposing externally driven policy agendas rather than mechanisms for supporting nationally determined development pathways. This is evident in many of

the conditionalities attached to JETP funding, including requirements for accelerated coal phase-out, liberalization of energy markets, and creation of investor-friendly environments. These conditionalities risk constraining the policy autonomy of developing countries and replicating patterns of climate-related structural adjustment. These arrangements are frequently accompanied by debt-creating instruments, reliance on blended finance, and speculative assumptions about private capital mobilization, all of which shift risk onto recipient states without guaranteeing equitable development outcomes.

Most JETP finance is loan-based, with grants making up less than 5%. South Africa's €8.5 billion JETP, for example, contains limited grant funding versus actual needs exceeding USD50 billion; the pledges for Indonesia's and Vietnam's JETPs also fall short. There is also no certainty with respect to the stability of the financial pledges made under the JETPs. For example, the US withdrew its participation in the South African JETP in March 2025, taking with it its contribution of USD56 million in grant funds and USD1 billion in commercial debt/equity from the US International Development Finance Corporation.[13] The US has also withdrawn from the Vietnam and Indonesia JETPs (it was not part of the donors' group for the JETP with Senegal).[14]

Despite promises of large-scale finance, JETPs have drawn criticism for privileging emissions reductions over development needs. Their design often mirrors patterns of financial dependency seen in resource-based economies, where development strategies are externally financed and heavily conditioned. The Gulf region's experience with state-led diversification underscores that financing strategies must avoid overreliance on volatile, debt-creating instruments or private capital seeking de-risked returns.[15] JETPs similarly risk entrenching external financial conditionalities without enabling recipient countries to pursue sovereign, development-driven transition paths. A just energy transition must therefore be grounded in long-term public financing strategies with strong state institutional capacity, rather than requiring the developing country partner to develop a pipeline of "bankable" or "investable" projects for the donors and private sector investors to choose from at their discretion alone.

Such financing profiles are deeply problematic in a global context of heightened debt distress, rising interest rates, and constrained fiscal space across the Global South. Far from facilitating energy transitions, these arrangements risk deepening the debt burdens of already vulnerable economies, while placing significant macroeconomic risks on recipient governments. Furthermore, the emphasis on private sector engagement, often driven by donor country development finance institutions, has led to opaque governance processes, limited public accountability, and conditionalities that privilege investor interests over developmental imperatives.

Crucially, many JETPs fail to adequately reflect the developmental priorities of and take into account structural constraints faced by recipient countries. They often neglect broader just transition needs including universal energy access, public ownership of energy systems, industrial transformation, and adaptation-related investments. In countries with vast energy access deficits and underdeveloped industrial sectors, transitions must go beyond decarbonization to include issues of energy justice, employment generation, and economic diversification. JETPs, as currently configured, risk imposing externally determined transition pathways that reproduce existing dependencies on developed country capital, technology, and expertise.

Moreover, the mitigation technology- and finance-linked architecture of JETPs tends to overlook the systemic inequities embedded in international trade, investment, and intellectual property regimes. Despite their emphasis on decarbonization, JETPs rarely include strong commitments on technology transfer, the relaxation of intellectual property barriers, or support for domestic manufacturing of renewable energy infrastructure. For example, South Africa's JETP only has broad references to "technological innovation" and contains minimal support for domestic clean energy manufacturing.[16] Vietnam's and Indonesia's JETPs do not contain any enforceable provisions on technology transfer.[17] Without addressing these systemic constraints, JETPs risk reinforcing the subordinate integration of developing countries into a global economy that is still largely dominated by the North.

This creates a problematic North-South asymmetry: while developing countries are urged to accelerate transitions under tight timelines with limited support, many developed countries continue expanding domestic fossil fuel

production and are slow to fulfil their own climate finance commitments. For example, the US, Canada, Australia, Norway, and the UK account for 51% of planned oil and gas expansion through 2050 even as they keep on calling for rapid transitions for developing countries.[18] As a result, JETPs risk reinforcing a narrative of urgency and discipline imposed on the South, while sidestepping the deeper political economy of fossil capitalism in the North.

The governance structures of JETPs also raise concerns about participation and representation. These often mirror the asymmetries present in broader trade and climate regimes. Decisions are heavily influenced by donor priorities and institutional preferences of multilateral development banks, lending themselves to criticism that echoes longstanding critiques of procedural and substantive imbalances in World Trade Organization (WTO) and UNFCCC processes.

JETP negotiations and implementation have often been led by elite technocratic policy actors with limited consultation of civil society, trade unions, subnational governments, or communities most affected by the energy transition.[19] For instance, JETP packages are typically anchored in technical working groups that are dominated by developed country donors and international financial institutions, with limited meaningful participation from local stakeholders, including affected communities, domestic industries, and subnational actors. Despite rhetorical commitments to national ownership and inclusivity, the governance of JETPs tends to replicate the top-down practices of earlier structural adjustment regimes, where funding is contingent upon alignment with donor priorities rather than nationally defined development strategies. This top-down approach contradicts the very principles of inclusive, equitable, and participatory decision-making that a just transition requires.[20] External financing that supports top-down and non-inclusive governance may hence end up entrenching elite control and centralization, rather than enabling democratic and socially equitable energy systems.

These critiques highlight the urgent need to reframe the political economy of JETPs. Rather than serving as instruments for external steering of domestic energy policy, JETPs must become mechanisms that enable developmental

sovereignty, equitable burden-sharing, and transformative structural change. This requires shifting away from market-centric models towards frameworks that prioritize public investment, local value creation, and regional cooperation. It also necessitates integrating JETPs into a broader system of multilateral obligations under the UNFCCC, particularly the commitments of developed countries to provide adequate, predictable, and grant-based climate finance under Article 4 of the UNFCCC and Articles 9 and 10 of the Paris Agreement.

In addition, the evolution of JETPs must be assessed in relation to broader geopolitical dynamics. The growing prominence of "climate clubs", green industrial policies in developed countries, and the rise of carbon border adjustment mechanisms (CBAMs) and the economic and technological competitiveness concerns that underlie these initiatives are likely to be among the strategic interests behind donor engagement in JETPs.[21] These initiatives increasingly function as tools for projecting influence, opening markets, and managing carbon leakage, rather than addressing the full spectrum of just transition needs in the Global South. Developing countries must therefore be vigilant in ensuring that JETPs do not become instruments of green conditionality or neocolonial governance in the name of climate cooperation.

Rather than empowering endogenous industrial strategies or supporting systemic energy access expansion, JETPs privilege quick wins and commercially viable renewable energy investments from developed country donors and private sector firms. This approach sidelines broader just transition imperatives, such as supporting decent work, expanding domestic productive capacity, and ensuring affordable and reliable energy for underserved populations. Additionally, the narrowly defined focus on mitigation, often centred on coal and other fossil fuel phase-out, disregards the equally urgent needs for adaptation, loss and damage, and climate resilience, which are priority areas for many developing countries under the UNFCCC framework. Finally, it also discourages South-South cooperation by privileging developed countries as JETP partners, potentially losing in the process the possibility of learning from and cooperation with other developing countries with respect to just energy transitions.

4 Paragraph 28(d) of Decision 1/CMA.5: Interpretation and Implications

PARAGRAPH 28(d) of decision 1/CMA.5, adopted at COP28 in Dubai in 2023, marks a politically significant, though highly contested, moment in the evolution of the global climate regime. During negotiations on the decision text, there were clear divergences between developed and developing countries on the interpretation and implications of the phrase "transitioning away from fossil fuels". For many industrialized countries, the emphasis was on establishing a global benchmark for phasing out fossil fuel use. In contrast, developing countries highlighted that any such transition must be supported by scaled-up international cooperation, particularly in the form of public finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building – longstanding obligations under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

In paragraph 28(d), for the first time, Parties formally recognized the need to transition "away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner", situating the language of equity and justice at the core of the energy transition discourse under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. This phrasing is politically and legally important: it affirms the centrality of equity and justice in operationalizing climate mitigation and reflects longstanding developing country demands for historical responsibility, development rights, and policy space to be embedded within global climate efforts.

However, while the inclusion of the "just, orderly and equitable" formulation is a diplomatic achievement for developing countries, especially within the G77 and China, its operational meaning remains open to divergent interpretations, particularly by developed countries and private sector actors seeking to promote market-led and finance-heavy pathways that may not align with the development imperatives of the Global South.

Paragraph 28 is based on and reinforces the Paris Agreement's broader legal architecture, particularly Articles 2.1 and 2.2, which affirm that climate action must be implemented "on the basis of equity" and in pursuit of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Any operationalization of the energy transition, whether through multilateral frameworks or bilateral finance instruments, must be consistent with these provisions.

From a critical perspective, paragraph 28 should hence be understood and implemented in a way which affirms the longstanding demand of developing countries that climate action, especially mitigation in the energy sector, must be pursued in a manner that is socially just, developmentally inclusive, and historically contextualized. It implies that transitions must respect the CBDR-RC principle, provide adequate means of implementation, and ensure that no country is penalized for pursuing development pathways that reflect its national circumstances and structural constraints. In this regard, CBDR-RC must be understood not only as a "core guiding principle" of equitable climate burden-sharing but also as a governance framework for global cooperation under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement.[22] As recognized and reflected under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, CBDR-RC demands differentiated support structures, provision of and access to financing and technology for developing countries, and sufficient policy space for developing countries to chart their own transition pathways in line with their national development priorities. The right to development, enshrined in international law, must be central to the design and implementation of any energy transition initiative, including JETPs.

In this context, the "just" component of paragraph 28 should be interpreted to mean that fossil fuel transitions must enhance, not undermine, human rights, social protection, decent work, energy access, and economic diversification. The "orderly" element should denote predictability and planning, avoiding abrupt dislocations to national economies or communities dependent on fossil fuel value chains. Most critically, the "equitable" dimension demands systemic correction of the imbalances in global financial, technological, and trade systems that limit developing countries' abilities to pursue low-carbon pathways autonomously and on fair terms.

For many developing countries, the energy transition cannot be decoupled from the broader goals of eradicating poverty, expanding productive capacity, and achieving universal energy services. The recognition that transitions must be "just" and "equitable" underscores the need for context-specific, nationally defined pathways that align climate goals with development imperatives.

For paragraph 28 to become a meaningful guidepost for climate cooperation, it must be operationalized through a restructured global transition support framework, one that centres the rights and priorities of the Global South. This includes scaling up grant-based public finance, supporting equitable access to clean energy technologies through technology transfer and intellectual property flexibilities, and ensuring that trade and investment rules do not constrain policy space for national transitions. It also demands greater participation of affected communities, workers, and domestic stakeholders in transition planning, consistent with the just transition principles recognized by ILO guidelines and reaffirmed in COP and CMA decisions.

In short, paragraph 28 must not be interpreted as an open-ended licence for donor-driven policy conditionality to enforce mitigation measures on developing country JETP partners. It should be the normative foundation for reimagining the energy transition as a global public good – one that is financed, governed, and implemented in ways that redress historical injustices, support sovereign development choices, and ensure that no one is left behind. Paragraph 28 reflects a more holistic approach that sees energy transitions not as ends in themselves, but as processes that must consider differentiated responsibilities, varied national starting points, and the imperatives of economic diversification and energy access for developing countries.

Yet, current JETP designs fail to reflect such an approach. The coal phase-out envisioned in these JETPs, for example, does not necessarily account for the differentiated pace and means by which countries can achieve such a phase-out, or for the support they are entitled to receive under Articles 4.5 and 9 of the Paris Agreement. The partnerships also tend to ignore the broader social and economic ramifications of transition, focusing instead on measurable emissions reduction outcomes rather than on building resilience, local capacity, or technology sovereignty.

To be credible and effective, JETPs and other energy transition initiatives must therefore move beyond donor-centric or mitigation-only paradigms. They must be anchored under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement and reflect a systemic understanding of equity and historical responsibility, with CBDR-RC as the guiding principle. They must address the full scope of climate and development challenges faced by developing counties to ensure that no country is forced to choose between climate ambition and developmental justice.

5 Development and Equity Challenges of Just Energy Transitions in the Global South

EFFORTS to promote just energy transitions in the Global South must confront a complex interplay of development imperatives, structural constraints, and equity considerations. While initiatives such as the JETPs are often presented as innovative mechanisms for supporting decarbonization in developing countries, many of these arrangements reflect a donor-driven, top-down logic. In practice, this often means a strong emphasis on mitigation objectives, particularly the rapid phase-out of coal, while critical dimensions such as adaptation, resilience, and inclusive development are either deprioritized or inadequately addressed.

A just transition, especially in the context of the Global South, cannot be divorced from the broader development agenda. It must reflect the realities of developing countries that are still in the midst of structural transformation and grappling with widespread poverty, energy insecurity, and economic inequity.[23] Across much of the Global South, energy transitions unfold in the context of persistent structural limitations. These include:

- Energy poverty: Nearly one billion people still lack access to electricity, while more than two billion still rely on polluting solid fuels (charcoal, wood, dung, coal) for cooking and heating. Universal access to clean, affordable, and reliable energy remains an unmet development imperative.[24]
- Externally imposed or rigid transition timelines could undermine macroeconomic stability and social cohesion if they do not account for sequencing and the need to safeguard basic energy access.
- Limited fiscal space: High debt burdens and austerity constraints restrict the ability of governments to invest in clean energy infrastructure, reskill workers, or provide social safety nets.[25]

- Technology and infrastructure gaps: Access to renewable energy technologies and transmission systems is uneven and constrained by intellectual property regimes, underinvestment, and lack of domestic manufacturing capacity.
- Informality and inequality: Informal employment dominates in many developing country economies, especially among women and youth, limiting the reach of conventional labour and social protection measures.[26]

In this context, the notion of a just energy transition must be redefined to reflect developmental priorities. For many developing countries, it is not enough to simply reduce emissions. A truly just transition, including in the energy sector, must be one that promotes economic diversification, generates decent work, enhances social protection, and contributes to long-term poverty eradication. It must take into account the real trade-offs that developing countries face, including the potential loss of livelihoods, fiscal instability, and social disruption that could arise from a rapid shift away from fossil fuels.

Policy and fiscal space must be safeguarded to ensure populations in developing countries can meet their basic energy needs in ways that are affordable, reliable, and socially just, including through transitional energy measures where renewable energy alternatives are not yet accessible. For instance, many developing countries facing severe renewable energy deficits have emphasized the importance of transitional solutions such as cleaner cooking fuels (e.g., LPG or natural gas) to replace traditional biomass like wood or charcoal, which carry severe health burdens and disproportionately impact women and girls.

As discussions around energy transitions gain momentum globally, policymakers, negotiators, and civil society actors in the Global South face the urgent task of shaping these processes in ways that reflect national development priorities and uphold principles of equity and justice.

Developing countries should focus on developing and proposing alternative frameworks to the current JETPs that foreground equity, participation, and national ownership. The aim is to reframe just transitions as developmental

pathways that respond to real constraints and create new opportunities rather than reflect externally determined mitigation trajectories.

For the Global South, the concept of a just transition must be fundamentally reoriented. It cannot be narrowly focused on mitigation or carbon metrics. Instead, it must prioritize:

- Poverty eradication and energy access as non-negotiable pillars of climate justice;
- Economic diversification and industrial development as means to reduce vulnerability and build long-term resilience;
- Job creation and support for informal workers, with attention to gender and youth dimensions;
- Safeguarding policy space to allow developing countries to determine appropriate energy pathways for meeting their basic needs and development priorities;
- Broad-based consultation and social dialogue, ensuring that communities, workers, women, and youth meaningfully participate in decision-making.

In this regard, developing country negotiators and advocates should push for international cooperation frameworks that respect CBDR-RC and the right to development, as enshrined in the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. This means resisting conditionalities that limit national sovereignty and promoting climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building on equitable and non-discriminatory terms.

For just transitions to be truly just, they must be owned, designed, and driven by the people and governments of developing countries themselves. Civil society has a vital role to play in ensuring transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness in these processes. Policymakers and negotiators must actively assert the need for nationally defined and context-specific pathways, backed by predictable and adequate international support.

In international climate and development fora, developing countries should continue advocating for transition frameworks that are not only environmentally sound, but also economically viable and socially fair. This

means integrating climate action into national development strategies and ensuring that transitions are aligned with longstanding goals of structural transformation, social equity, and resilience.

In this light, JETPs should be critically assessed against four core equity-based benchmarks: (1) whether they provide sufficient grant-based and concessional public finance to avoid deepening debt or fiscal constraints; (2) whether they ensure real and affordable access to climate-related technologies, including through intellectual property flexibilities allowed under the WTO's TRIPS Agreement, pooled procurement, and public licensing; (3) whether they institutionalize mechanisms for inclusive governance, transparency, and participation of workers, communities, and national stakeholders in decision-making; and (4) consistency with and supportiveness for national development priorities. Only when these equity dimensions are operationalized, rather than just rhetorically referenced or paid lip service to, can JETPs evolve into a credible model for just energy transitions in developing countries.

The current JETPs generally do not reflect an integrated development approach. From a Global South perspective, this raises several critical equity concerns.

First, the baseline conditions for transition differ vastly between developed and developing countries. Many developing countries are simultaneously attempting to expand access and build domestic capacity given that energy poverty remains acute in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and small island developing states.[27] For these countries, the transition must entail not only a shift in the energy mix but also a massive scaling up of infrastructure, public services, and productive energy use – none of which can be achieved through market-driven solutions alone.

Second, the macroeconomic constraints confronting many Global South countries further complicate transition efforts. These include high debt burdens,[28] limited fiscal space, volatile capital flows, and dependence on fossil fuel revenues or imported energy. A rapid withdrawal from fossil fuel–linked sectors, especially if externally imposed or hastily implemented, could result in significant macroeconomic and social dislocation,

particularly in countries that rely on oil, gas, or coal for public revenues, foreign exchange earnings, or employment.[29] This underlines the need for a carefully sequenced, nationally tailored approach that aligns climate goals with structural economic transformation.[30]

Third, the asymmetry in access to affordable finance and climate technologies remains a central barrier. Despite repeated commitments, developed countries have failed to deliver adequate, predictable, and concessional support to developing countries for climate action. JETPs have so far reinforced rather than corrected this trend. The assumption underlying the JETPs that private finance will fill the gap ignores the realities of investment risk profiles and the limited bankability of socially and developmentally necessary projects in the Global South.

Finally, equity in transition must include the meaningful participation of workers, communities, women, Indigenous Peoples, and other historically marginalized groups – not just as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of transition strategies. In practice, however, decision-making on energy transitions, especially in JETP contexts, has largely been concentrated among central governments, donors, and international financial institutions. This undermines democratic ownership and the legitimacy of transition planning, and risks further entrenching inequality and exclusion.

In short, energy transitions in the Global South should be occurring under fundamentally different economic, social, and political conditions than in the Global North. Applying uniform transition models without addressing these disparities not only risks failure but also reproduces the structural injustices of the global economy.

6 Proposals for Alternative Frameworks and Approaches for Equitable Just Energy Transitions

THE experience of JETPs in South Africa, Indonesia, and Vietnam exposes a fundamental misalignment between the stated ambition of "just transitions" and the actual practice of donor-driven, loan-heavy, and market-oriented energy partnerships. If JETPs are to be meaningful tools for enabling equitable transitions in the Global South, they must be radically rethought away from the logic of financialized, conditional partnerships and towards frameworks grounded in development sovereignty, distributive justice, and structural transformation. A fundamental reorientation is needed, one that centres the principles of equity and CBDR-RC, national ownership, and developmental justice.

i. Rebalancing the Financing Architecture: From Debt Dependence to Grants, Concessionality and Redistribution

A central flaw in existing JETPs is their overwhelming reliance on loans and private capital mobilization. This approach deepens debt vulnerabilities, distorts national planning priorities, and undermines the redistributive potential of transition finance.

An alternative approach with respect to financing just energy transitions should:

- Prioritize public and grant-based finance to developing countries by virtue of their status as developing countries rather than pegging financing access to commercial viability.
- Ensure financing terms are transparent, concessional, and free of conditionalities that undermine policy autonomy.
- Integrate debt justice mechanisms, including debt cancellation or swaps tied to climate and social development goals.

Moreover, climate finance must be reframed not merely as a tool for carbon mitigation, but as a mechanism for compensating historical and ongoing climate injustices, enabling structural change, and fulfilling the right to development. This implies that JETPs must be embedded in the broader architecture of climate reparations, global tax justice, and multilateral debt reform.

ii. Strengthening National Ownership and Democratic Governance

Current JETPs are largely shaped by the geopolitical and commercial interests of donor countries and financial institutions. Across JETPs, decision-making processes have remained largely opaque and centralized within elite policy circles driven by donor countries.

A more equitable model must centre nationally determined priorities and democratic governance mechanisms, ensuring that affected stakeholders – especially subnational authorities, Indigenous Peoples, women, labour unions, and frontline communities – play a substantive role in planning, implementation, and monitoring. This entails embedding transition governance within inclusive national development frameworks and ensuring that institutional mechanisms – such as just transition commissions – are genuinely participatory and accountable. In this context, national ownership of just energy transitions could be strengthened by:

- Anchoring JETPs in inclusive national just transition frameworks, supported by well-resourced multi-stakeholder platforms that include social partners, community representatives, and local governments.
- Institutionalizing just transition commissions or councils with formal decision-making roles and oversight powers.
- Requiring transparency of donor and investor negotiations, terms of finance, and project pipelines.
- Ensuring that workers' rights and social protections are safeguarded, including through guaranteed social safety nets, reskilling programmes, and public employment strategies.

To support this shift, capacity-building, technology cooperation, and South-South knowledge exchange must be scaled up to reduce dependence on external actors and enable endogenous transition planning.

iii. Integrating Just Energy Transition Within Broader Development Strategies

Rather than framing energy transition narrowly around emissions reductions, equitable JETPs must be situated within broader strategies of industrial transformation, economic diversification, and development. This includes:

- Embedding JETPs within broader development plans, including national development strategies, industrial policy roadmaps, and energy access goals by linking energy planning to green industrial policy, so that domestic manufacturing, skills development, and employment generation are central components of the transition.
- Linking renewable energy deployment to domestic manufacturing and value chains, using tools such as local content requirements, public procurement, and strategic subsidies.
- Ensuring regional equity in planning and resource allocation, especially in coal-dependent and historically marginalized areas.
- Incorporating social protection systems that support workers and communities through retraining, pension guarantees, healthcare, and alternative livelihoods.
- Supporting public ownership and cooperative models for energy infrastructure and services, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.
- Prioritizing universal energy access, especially for the poor, ensuring that energy affordability and energy democracy are central to transition planning.

Such approaches require policy coherence across sectors and must resist the fragmentation often introduced by externally led projects with narrowly defined metrics of "bankability" or "climate impact".

iv. Moving from Conditionality to Cooperation: Operationalizing CBDR-RC

JETPs should reflect and integrate the equity and differentiation principles enshrined in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement. True partnership under the UNFCCC framework must reflect the CBDR-RC principle. This means avoiding "one-size-fits-all" blueprints or approaches that may be preferred by donor coordination platforms like the International Partners

Group (IPG) or multilateral development banks. This requires rejecting the policy conditionality, liberalization mandates, and technocratic benchmarks embedded in current JETP models. Instead, support should be aligned with sovereign national planning systems, uphold policy space, and be responsive to countries' self-defined development paths.

An equitable architecture would:

- Be anchored in UNFCCC-aligned multilateral frameworks, rather than donor-led clubs or informal coalitions.
- Respect nationally determined just energy transition plans, without imposing external standards or conditionalities related to inappropriate mitigation, liberalization or deregulation.
- Provide differentiated support based on country circumstances, historical emissions, and development needs.
- Create space for South-South collaboration on technology development, peer learning, and joint energy infrastructure initiatives. South-South cooperation can play a catalytic role in this regard, offering alternative sources of financing, technology exchange, and strategic collaboration that are more aligned with Global South priorities. Examples include the BRICS New Development Bank, the African Union's just transition initiatives, or ASEAN-led regional energy cooperation frameworks.

v. Ensuring Policy Space and Trade-Climate Coherence

JETPs exist within a broader ecosystem of trade, investment, intellectual property, and climate governance regimes. Unless designed carefully, they can erode national policy space, especially where tied to external market access, investor protection clauses, or restrictive intellectual property rules. JETPs must not become vehicles for donor-driven structural adjustment or gateways for locking Global South countries into unequal positions in global value chains. An equitable framework must guard against trade and investment conditionalities, including intellectual property restrictions, investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) risks, and deregulation pressures, that undermine long-term policy autonomy.

Instead, JETPs should enable countries to implement strategic trade and industrial policies, use TRIPS flexibilities to access climate-relevant

technologies, and support the development of public ownership models for critical energy infrastructure. Specifically, equitable JETPs should:

- Guarantee the right to regulate in the public interest, including over strategic sectors and technologies.
- Promote TRIPS flexibilities and support public and open-source technology initiatives in the developing country partner.
- Avoid embedding ISDS provisions or investment protections that constrain government actions in the public interest.
- Support the development of national standards, assurance systems, and certification schemes that are internationally respected but locally defined.

Only with policy space can developing countries innovate and pursue transitions that are truly tailored to their people's needs and aspirations.

vi. Charting a Sovereign Path for Just Transitions

Current JETPs risk reinforcing the very inequities they claim to address. To fulfil their promise, they must be reimagined not as technocratic financial packages focused on mitigation measures, but as political and developmental compacts rooted in climate justice. Reimagining JETPs requires rejecting the current paradigm of conditional, debt-heavy, and mitigation-centric partnerships in favour of sovereign, equity-centred, and development-driven cooperation frameworks. For the Global South, just transitions cannot be decoupled from the fight for economic justice, climate reparations, and systemic reform of the international financial architecture.

This shift demands not only new sources and structures of finance, but also a new political compact that is rooted in solidarity, historical responsibility, and the affirmation of the Global South's right to development on its own terms. Equitable just transitions, including in the energy sector, must thus be anchored not in donor benevolence, but in justice, solidarity, and the democratization of climate finance governance. This requires:

- Moving away from donor control and private finance reliance, and respecting regulation for the public interest, national sovereignty, and state-led policy and financing approaches.

- Building institutional capacity and participatory governance in recipient countries to lead the transition.
- Shifting from mitigation delivery mechanisms to just transition ecosystems that uphold rights, redistribute power, and ensure sustainable livelihoods.
- Anchoring JETPs in a broader agenda for international climate cooperation reform, including debt relief, technology sharing, and fair trade rules.

For the Global South, just transitions are not simply about energy, they are about reclaiming development trajectories, challenging structural injustices, and building a new global order based on equity and solidarity.

As the concept of just transitions becomes increasingly central to international climate discourse, developing countries must seize the opportunity to advance alternative frameworks that align more closely with their developmental priorities, national circumstances, and the principles of equity enshrined in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement. Developing countries through the G77 and China have consistently emphasized that just transitions must not be reduced to labour market adjustments in energy transitions.

At the heart of the G77's position is the recognition that CBDR-RC must guide both the framing and operationalization of just transitions. This includes differentiated timelines for fossil fuel phase-outs, greater flexibility in transition pathways, and the central importance of means of implementation (MOI), namely climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity-building, which must precede or accompany any expectations of decarbonization.

Rather than being reactive, G77 countries can proactively reshape the global narrative. Just transition should not be viewed merely as a social policy concern tied to mitigation efforts, but as a cross-cutting enabler of all three pillars of the Paris Agreement: mitigation, adaptation, and means of implementation. This broader and more holistic framing is essential for safeguarding policy space and promoting economic transformation.

7 Recommendations for Future Just Energy Transition Frameworks

TO advance equitable and development-oriented energy transitions, both multilateral and national frameworks must evolve beyond narrow mitigation-focused models like the current generation of JETPs. The Global South must therefore proactively shape a second generation of just transition frameworks – grounded in equity, national ownership, and sustainable development – across three levels: multilateral, national, and coalition-building platforms.

i. Multilateral Level: Shaping Global Norms and Frameworks

At the international level, the UNFCCC's Just Transition Work Programme offers a crucial institutional space to articulate and consolidate equitable principles for just energy transitions. It is imperative that the JTWP maintain a broad, holistic scope that goes beyond energy sector labour concerns to encompass adaptation, resilience, development, and poverty eradication.

To operationalize this ambition, developing countries should push for a robust work plan under the JTWP that includes:

- The establishment of a just transition technical assistance network (JT-TAN) architecture through which developing countries would be able to obtain the technical assistance and other support they need for their just energy transition priorities and activities. Establishing a JT-TAN under the JTWP would help operationalize Parties' equity- and CBDR-RC-based commitments by matching developing countries' needs for rapid, demand-driven technical assistance support for the design and implementation of nationally determined just transition strategies, including for the energy sector, with relevant technical assistance providers. The network can help close critical capacity gaps

by offering peer learning, policy toolkits, and technical help on jobs and skills mapping, social protection and reskilling, enterprise support, fiscal and industrial policy for domestic manufacturing, technology access and localization, gender- and youth-responsive planning, and monitoring, reporting and verification of the provision of support to developing countries for their just transition actions. Having a JT-TAN would accelerate implementable, finance-ready just transition plans, including in the energy sector, while respecting national circumstances and development priorities.

- Development of guidance to the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement Financial Mechanism's operating entities (Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, Adaptation Fund) as well as other bilateral and multilateral climate finance providers to ensure that grant-based financing support for just energy transition pathways is integrated in their funding portfolios for developing countries. Financing for just transitions must prioritize public, concessional, and grant-based support. Developing such guidance is essential to align finance with Parties' equity and CBDR-RC obligations and to avoid deepening debt burdens in already constrained developing economies. Grants are the appropriate instrument for the non-revenue-generating but indispensable elements of a just transition – such as national planning and social dialogue, skills and enterprise support, social protection and community compensation, coal and industrial site remediation, early-stage project preparation, and technology access, development, innovation and localization efforts – which loans and purely risk-sharing tools do not credibly fund. Clear guidance would: (i) set portfolio guidelines for funding just transition activities, (ii) support the development of country-driven just transition plans, and (iii) encourage coordinated country programming for just transition with NDCs, national adaptation plans, and other national climate action plans. This could help catalyze additional concessional co-finance while ensuring transitions are fast, fair, and fiscally sustainable. Just transition financing should also include debt relief measures, fiscal space safeguards, and mechanisms to avoid locking countries into new cycles of financial dependence. Importantly, JETP finance must be aligned with national budgetary systems and development planning

institutions rather than disbursed through fragmented donor platforms with conditionalities and opaque governance.

- Development of guidance to the UNFCCC Technology Mechanism's bodies (Technology Executive Committee, Climate Technology Centre and Network, Technology Implementation Programme) to ensure that technology transfer and development support are enhanced and strengthened in terms of actual delivery, transfer, and innovation of energy technologies to developing countries to support their just energy transition pathways. Effective just transitions in the Global South require not only finance, but also the systemic transfer of climate-relevant technologies under terms that reflect equity and historical responsibility. As recent scholarship highlights, "equity-oriented technology transfer must go beyond voluntary mechanisms and address systemic barriers posed by restrictive intellectual property rights, high technology costs, and asymmetric innovation capacities". This implies reforming existing global intellectual property frameworks and establishing mechanisms for public domain licensing, open-source innovation, and South-South technology co-development. Moreover, as argued in recent analyses, ensuring that transferred technologies are adaptable to local conditions and embedded in national innovation systems is essential for building long-term endogenous capacities, rather than fostering continued dependency on foreign technology providers. In articulating an alternative framework, developing countries should insist that technology transfer be treated not as a market transaction but as a right under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement. As noted in the literature, this involves "a rethinking of technology as a global public good, necessitating both supply-side commitments from developed countries and demand-side capacity support for recipient states". Mechanisms such as regional technology hubs, cooperative patent pools, and strengthened public research and development (R&D) budgets in the South can help overcome the current fragmentation of climate technology access and implementation.

- Development of a dialogue process for the facilitative sharing of views under which Parties, with developed countries taking the lead, can showcase and demonstrate leadership in phasing out fossil fuels domestically and scaling up means of implementation. A dedicated,

non-punitive forum aligned with CBDR-RC would let countries present concrete policies (coal retirement schedules, oil and gas production limits, subsidy reform, public-finance exclusion policies, methane abatement, clean-power build-out) alongside the finance, technology, and capacity-building they need or are mobilizing internationally (grant windows, concessional facilities, de-risking tools, intellectual property/technology access measures, and support for domestic manufacturing). The dialogue could strengthen trust, reduce asymmetries, and support international cooperation. It would also generate practical templates for others, provide lessons into the Global Stocktake (GST) and NDC cycles, and ensure that leadership is evidenced by both domestic decarbonization and scaled support that enables just transitions in developing countries.

- The UNFCCC secretariat could be tasked with preparing a synthesis report on lessons learned from existing JETPs, looking at them from the perspective of equity, national ownership, and developmental outcomes.

ii. National Level: Advancing Country-Driven, Developmental Just Transitions

A truly just energy transition cannot be imposed from above through technical assistance and financial engineering. It must emerge from democratic, nationally determined processes that prioritize the needs and aspirations of workers, communities, and future generations. In this regard, the dominant JETP approach fails the test of justice. It replicates the shortcomings of past structural adjustment models: insufficient country ownership, limited public participation, and a narrow focus on macroeconomic targets over inclusive development.

JETPs must be rooted in participatory national processes that give meaningful voice to affected workers, communities, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and civil society actors. National ownership must go beyond formal government buy-in to include transparent and inclusive mechanisms for consultation, grievance redress, and social accountability. A truly just transition cannot happen without the consent and leadership of those most affected by climate and development decisions. National just transition

frameworks should therefore be developed in alignment with country-specific development goals, industrial policy priorities, and the principles of social dialogue and human rights.

At the national level, just transition strategies must be embedded within broader development plans, including NDCs, industrial policies, and long-term transformation strategies. Transitions must be nationally designed and socially inclusive, with mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders – particularly informal sector workers, women, Indigenous Peoples, and youth. Key recommendations for national frameworks include:

- Establishing inclusive governance platforms for just energy transition planning, modelled on public consultation councils or social dialogue mechanisms that institutionalize bottom-up decision-making.
- Treating energy transition as part of a wider process of structural economic transformation, including green industrial policy, regional development strategies, and diversification away from fossil fuel dependence.
- Investing in domestic capacity for renewable energy innovation, manufacturing, deployment, and maintenance, with a strong emphasis on green job creation and vocational training.
- Institutionalizing participatory processes, ensuring marginalized communities are not only consulted but actively co-shape transition strategies and monitor implementation.

JETPs must be anchored in development-first approaches that promote energy access, decent work, poverty eradication, and economic diversification. Energy transition investments must align with national plans for industrial upgrading, domestic manufacturing, and technological learning. Rather than prioritizing the rapid retirement of fossil fuel assets based on donor timelines, JETPs must support the expansion of reliable, affordable, and clean energy systems that meet the needs of underserved populations, small businesses, and social infrastructure. Energy transitions should foster local manufacturing, boost technological innovation, and enable industrial upgrading, not substitute imported clean technologies for fossil fuel dependence.

JETPs should explicitly recognize and support leapfrogging opportunities in developing countries not just in terms of clean energy deployment, but also in the creation of green industrial ecosystems that can generate long-term employment and technological capabilities. This implies sustained support for domestic innovation systems, skills training, and research and development. This requires rethinking how leapfrogging is conceptualized and supported. Leapfrogging is not just about skipping fossil fuels; it is about building sovereign industrial and technological capabilities. This means sustained investments in local innovation systems, skills development, public R&D, and coordinated industrial policies that integrate energy transitions with long-term development strategies.

True justice in energy transitions demands that developing countries reclaim the policy and technological sovereignty necessary to define their own development paths. Current trade, investment, and intellectual property regimes continue to constrain the very tools needed to build domestic renewable energy industries, regulate foreign capital, and scale local innovation. JETPs should, instead, safeguard policy space for industrial and energy policy through tools like public procurement, state-owned enterprises, local content requirements, and TRIPS flexibilities.

Developing countries require support for endogenous technological development. JETPs must therefore invest in cooperative research partnerships, South-South technology alliances, and open licensing arrangements that promote shared knowledge and avoid technological dependence on Northern firms. Publicly funded, mission-oriented innovation must be prioritized over proprietary, market-based technology solutions.

JETPs should explicitly support the development of endogenous technological capacities, rather than perpetuating technology dependency. Current JETPs rarely include concrete commitments on technology transfer or intellectual property flexibility, leaving developing countries dependent on Northern technologies instead of fostering endogenous innovation. Donor countries must go beyond offering commercial technologies and instead ensure that financing includes support for open innovation systems, cooperative R&D, and public interest licensing arrangements. South-South cooperation, regional technology alliances, and publicly funded clean

energy research networks should also be integral to just transition financing frameworks.

iii. South-Led Alternatives: Reframing the Model through Solidarity and Cooperation

Developing countries should actively advocate for South-led alternatives to the current JETP framework. This includes building on the idea of having a South-South Just Transition Cooperation Platform, potentially with the support of BRICS+, the African Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Caribbean Community, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to develop endogenous models based on solidarity rather than donor leverage. Such a platform would enable shared learning, joint R&D, regional value chains, and collective bargaining with donors and technology providers. It could prioritize:

- South-South financing cooperation arrangements that rebalance towards grants and concessional financing, avoiding the debt traps often embedded in current transition packages.
- A reframing of "just" transitions to reflect nationally determined definitions centred on social justice, development, and equity – rather than externally imposed carbon targets or fossil fuel phase-out schedules.
- Avoiding externally prescribed structural reforms tied to market liberalization or austerity. Instead, conditions for finance should be co-developed and oriented towards equity outcomes, such as public service delivery, decent work, and inclusive economic participation.

iv. Messaging and Coalition-Building: Positioning the Global South as Rule-Shapers

A key political strategy for developing countries lies in shaping the narrative and building coalitions to advance second-generation just transition frameworks, i.e., those that move beyond narrow decarbonization targets to centre development sovereignty, jobs, industrial policy, technology access, and social protection.

Narrative power determines whose problems get solved and with what instruments: without a coordinated Southern storyline, donor-led templates risk locking countries into debt-heavy, import-dependent transitions that erode policy space. Coalition-building, particularly among developing countries, creates the political power base to more effectively negotiate grant-based finance, intellectual property/technology arrangements, and domestic manufacturing support consistent with CBDR-RC, while resisting adverse trade and supply-chain spillovers – turning developing countries from being rule-takers into being rule-makers. A unified platform can set common "minimum asks" across UNFCCC processes (JTWP, GST, new collective quantified goal on climate finance), align positions at the WTO and international financial institutions, and generate replicable policy toolkits. In short, controlling the story and the coalition turns fragmented, reactive bargaining into proactive agenda-setting that delivers fast, fair, and development-positive transitions.

8 Conclusion

THE promise of JETPs as instruments of climate and development justice remains deeply contested. While framed as innovative mechanisms to support decarbonization in developing countries, their current design, governance, and financing architecture largely reflect a donor-driven, technocratic vision that fails to account for the structural inequalities embedded in the global economy and climate regime. Rather than enabling transformative change, prevailing JETPs risk reproducing the very asymmetries they purport to address.

In this context, JETPs appear increasingly misaligned with the spirit and intent of paragraph 28(d) of decision 1/CMA.5 adopted at COP28, which emphasized the need for a "just, orderly, and equitable" transition away from fossil fuels. As currently designed, JETPs risk promoting transitions that are neither nationally determined nor equitably supported. Critically, JETPs fall short in operationalizing the CBDR-RC principle. They do not provide a predictable or adequate scale of public finance and technology transfer from developed countries, as mandated under Articles 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 of the UNFCCC and reinforced by Article 9 of the Paris Agreement. The emphasis on private capital mobilization and blended finance shifts the burden of risk and repayment onto recipient countries, contradicting the historical obligation of developed countries to provide new and additional resources to support low-carbon development in the Global South.

This paper has argued that if JETPs are to be truly "just", they must be reclaimed as tools for advancing structural transformation, equity, and development sovereignty in the Global South. Such a reimagining demands that JETPs go beyond carbon accounting and embrace a holistic approach to justice – one that addresses historical responsibility, development deficits, social inclusion, and the need for an enabling global economic environment.

Their current design suffers from serious limitations in terms of equity, agency, and alignment with just transition principles. If they are to be truly transformative, JETPs must be restructured as demand-driven, grant-based, participatory partnerships that reflect the development strategies of recipient countries rather than the geopolitical or commercial interests of donor states. They must also be situated within a systemic reform agenda that includes technology democratization, fiscal justice, and trade rules that support sustainable development.

A genuinely just energy transition must emerge from nationally determined processes that centre the lived realities and development aspirations of workers, communities, and marginalized groups. It must be underpinned by transparent and participatory governance, grant-based and concessionary finance, and respect for the policy autonomy of recipient countries. It must recognize the centrality of energy access, decent work, industrial upgrading, and endogenous technological innovation as core objectives of the transition.

Reclaiming the "just" in JETPs also requires a shift in the global political economy of climate finance. The present moment is marked by a resurgence of green industrial policy and climate unilateralism in developed countries, including export restrictions, carbon border taxes, and subsidy wars. These trends further constrain the development space of the Global South while excluding it from the commanding heights of the green economy. JETPs must not become instruments that entrench this exclusion. Instead, they should be reframed within a broader struggle for international equity, multilateral reform, and reparative climate finance.

In this regard, developing countries must push back against narratives that render them passive recipients of externally defined energy transitions. Instead, they must assert their right to define and implement transition pathways that are aligned with their development models, industrial strategies, and long-term resilience goals. This includes reclaiming policy space for public investment, industrial policy, and technological learning – tools that were once denied under structural adjustment and are again under threat from restrictive trade and investment rules.

As climate negotiations move forward, including under the UNFCCC's Just Transition Work Programme, the Global South has an opportunity to advance a positive and proactive agenda for just transitions – one that is rooted in human rights, labour rights, and the right to development. The struggle over the meaning and practice of "just transition" is therefore not only a technical or financial one – it is fundamentally a political and ideological struggle over whose interests, voices, and visions will shape the low-carbon future.

An equitable just transition framework for the Global South must be development-driven and state-led, rather than shaped by donor priorities or private finance imperatives. Public investment must play a leading role, with strategies designed to align with national development plans and long-term climate goals. This includes directing public finance towards infrastructure, skills development, and local industry support.

At the international level, regional platforms such as BRICS+, the African Union, and ASEAN can serve as important venues for strengthening South-South cooperation on finance and technology. These efforts can support the creation of regional renewable energy hubs, green technology transfer funds, and development banks that reduce dependence on conditional finance from the Global North.

Crucially, just transition frameworks must reject one-size-fits-all phase-out timelines and instead be based on differentiated responsibility, capacity, and development stage. Developed countries with higher historical emissions and greater wealth must lead on fossil fuel phase-outs, while developing countries retain the space needed for energy expansion, industrialization, and structural transformation. In this context, JETPs can either become the next generation of externally imposed adjustment, or they can be reimagined as vehicles for decolonizing development, repairing climate injustice, and empowering countries to build sovereign, inclusive, and climate-resilient economies. The choice, ultimately, must rest with the peoples and governments of the Global South.

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EQUITY AND DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS OF JUST ENERGY TRANSITION PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Touted as an innovative form of international cooperation to tackle climate change, Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) are supposed to channel financial and technical support from donors for a shift to clean energy systems in developing countries. Such support is, however, often tied to a policy agenda driven by donor developed countries and financial institutions – an agenda which narrowly prioritizes emission reductions over broader development needs. Furthermore, the financing is heavily reliant on loans and private capital mobilization, deepening indebtedness and limiting fiscal autonomy in the recipient countries.

Uncovering the fundamental flaws in the current JETP model, this paper stresses the imperative of undertaking energy transitions in a "just, orderly and equitable" manner, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) enshrined in the United Nations climate regime. To be genuinely just, the transition framework must be backed by grant-based public finance and ensure affordable transfer of renewable energy technologies. It should also involve workers, communities and other transition-affected sectors in decision-making, and be aligned with national development goals of energy access, job creation and economic diversification.

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