

# Climate Change and the Just Energy Transition

**IS AFRICA TRAPPED?**



September 2022

This is a Southern African Trust publication  
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# Introduction



Addressing climate change and a just energy transition are inseparable; they are two sides of the same coin. We need an energy transition to resolve the climate crisis. Climate change is a manmade disaster that requires a human solution. In the absence of technology that can reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to zero, the solution to climate change is the full reduction of emissions by making the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources (solar, wind, and batteries for electrical vehicles). Under the Paris Agreement the world has agreed that coal-burning needs to reach zero by 2050, and gas and oil extraction need to be abandoned if we are to reach the goal of limiting average global warming to 1.5° Celsius (2.7° Fahrenheit).

In November 2022, 11 years after COP17 in Durban, the UN Conference of Parties on climate change (COP27) returns to Africa. COP 27 will be in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. This happens against the backdrop of multiple global crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine-Russia war, and growing tension between the USA and China. These global

crises are taking pre-eminence on the global stage, overshadowing the climate emergency. Geo-political confrontations for world supremacy do not favour a united front against the common challenge and do not help the implementation of the historic Glasgow Climate Pact, which contains significant commitments on climate mitigation, on adaptation, and on finance, and which sets out a way forward on the crucial issue of loss and damage.

All the evidence, including the latest findings from various UN reports, makes it clear that the threat of catastrophic climate change is the single most important danger facing humanity. In Egypt, Africa has an opportunity to bring back climate change as the most urgent and pressing global crisis of our time. COP27 will be an opportunity for Africa to regroup and enter the negotiations as a united front; not unity for the sake of it, but unity of purpose, putting African positions at the centre of the discussion.

While working with other countries at COP27 on the global goal of adaptation and mitigation to strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change, Africans must work together to defend and protect the continent's interests, just as other continents are doing. African delegates at COP27 should aim to achieve three things. First, demonstrate why Africa's readiness to make the transition to green energy is dependent on developed countries fulfilling their commitment to finance Africa's energy transition; second, clarify what a just energy transition means in the context of the African continent; and third, communicate Africa's position on fossil fuels, critical minerals, and forests in the context of the energy transition. This policy paper discusses these issues and related concerns.

# Is Africa ready for the energy transition?

Answering this question is critical to finding a sustainable solution to the challenges that the continent faces to secure a just energy transition. This question raises another question: how quickly can Africa make the transition to renewable energy?

Climate change is presenting itself as probably the most difficult challenge facing Africa in the coming decade; it has the potential to derail or reverse the continent's path to development. Africa is witnessing the worst impact associated with global warming, with phenomena such as droughts, floods, and cyclones. Climate change impact is already costing African economies between 3- 5 percent of their GDP.<sup>1</sup> As climate change worsens, it will increase the resource crunch and human migrations, and will lead to more conflicts between African people as they compete for scarce resources. Climate change is an obstacle to Africa's ability to develop in a sustainable manner. Although it is the lowest polluter (contributing less than 4 per cent to global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions), it has been argued that Africa has no option but to stop its emissions. "It is projected that African emissions could double by 2050, which is a scenario we cannot afford – we have reached planetary boundaries. A way forward is to prevent a lock into large future emissions by increasing investments in clean energy,"<sup>2</sup> argues Masego Madzwamuse. Fifty-four African countries have ratified the Paris Agreement and

drafted the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) as part of their commitment to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. However, despite this commitment, the question remains is Africa ready?

In 2009, as part of the Paris Agreement, developed nations committed to support climate change adaptation and mitigation activities in developing countries to the tune of US\$100 billion a year until 2020. They agreed to support the implementation of just transitions that promote sustainable development, poverty eradication, and the creation of decent work and quality jobs. It was argued that "Africa's vulnerability to climate change creates a compelling case for it to receive significant funding for adaptation."<sup>3</sup> To date the developed countries' promises have not materialized.

*"The total adaptation finance being provided by developed nations remains far below the scale necessary to respond to existing and future African climate change challenges."<sup>4</sup>*

Most African countries have been neglected by international climate finance support. Western commitment has been fading away despite the symbolic gesture shown at COP26 when South Africa

1. AfDB, *Climate Change Impacts on Africa's Economic Growth*, [https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb-economics\\_of\\_climate\\_change\\_in\\_africa.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/afdb-economics_of_climate_change_in_africa.pdf), Accessed 29/08/2022
2. Masego Madzwamuse, *Keynote speech at the 3rd African Philanthropy Conference, Johannesburg, 2-4th August 2022*
3. *Ibid*
4. *Providing information on future finance levels is challenging, partly because not all countries can provide information about future budget allocations, and because actual climate finance depends on unknowns such as recipient demand, availability of projects, and indirect economic factors.*
5. *South Africa is the largest emitter of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the twenty largest GHG emitters in the world. The carbon intensity of its economy results from the large role of energy intensive mining and extractive industries, and its ongoing dependence on coal to generate electricity. The 8 billion was offered by UK, US, Germany, France and the European Union*

received US\$8.5 billion (to support its transition from fossil fuel) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) received US\$500 million (to protect its forests)<sup>6</sup>. In the case of South Africa, The Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) is not clear how the investment will be implemented. For the DRC, the funds could be managed by international organisations on behalf of the DRC government. The DRC has already made a U-turn on its commitment threatening to extract oil and gas in its tropical forest. The finance reaching African countries is nowhere near enough to meet the continent's needs, especially for immediate adaptation measures.<sup>7</sup> Recent analysis like the one from the World Bank's latest Africa's Pulse report estimates that sub-Saharan Africa will require about \$30 billion to \$50 billion each year over the next decade to finance investments in climate adaptation.<sup>8</sup> UNEP's Adaptation Gap Report (UNEP, 2021) estimates that annual adaptation costs in developing economies will be in the range of US\$155 to 330 billion by 2030. While it is difficult to make sense of these figures, under the current circumstances Africa will not raise this amount. Despite a generally accepted conclusion that Africa faces challenges and needs finance commensurate to its challenges, support from the developed countries has not been forthcoming.<sup>9</sup> Also, these amounts are far too insufficient to compensate for stranded assets. The pledges should consider the order of the magnitude of the potential economic damage from redundant assets. It will not be fair for developing countries in general, and for Africa in particular to see the advent of stranded assets as de facto public good.

The reality is that western countries have the

finances, but they are simply not willing to support Africa. Ukraine is projected to receive more than 65 billion in aid this year as a response to the disruption caused by Russia's war.<sup>10</sup> It means the West has the finances and are simply not prepared to support Africa. Despite an increase in approved finance in absolute terms, Africa has received only a small proportion of new adaptation finance to date. Africa might be committed to the energy transition but lacks the tools, finances, and technology to act on this commitment. Commitment without capacity is futile. In the short to medium term, the only way for Africa to make the change to green energy is with financial and technological support from the developed countries.<sup>11</sup>

What should Africa do now that the West is showing reluctance to finance clean energy? It is weakness to believe that developed countries will fully finance Africa's energy transition. Since independence, the West's promises to help Africa with its development have been an illusion. The West's approach in their cooperation with Africa has never been to cure the disease but rather to keep the continent as a permanent patient that needs continuous support. There is no sign that developed countries are this time prepared to be fair and just towards Africa, even though Africa is a victim of their pollution. It is not surprising therefore that "... funding that is currently delivered is far from fulfilling the demonstrated adaptation needs of Africa."<sup>12</sup> The discussion on energy transition continues to reflect the old global aid architecture, where the most powerful lead the negotiations and decide when and how certain actions should take place. This is reflected in the

6. *The Glasgow Climate Conference (COP26) agreed the declaration on the use of forests and reversing deforestation.*
7. *There are key areas where climate finance for adaptation goes. These include, first, solar photovoltaic and onshore wind, which continued to be the main recipient of renewable energy finance; second low-carbon transport, which is the fastest-growing sector (battery electric vehicles and chargers); third mitigation investment in hard-to-decarbonise sectors, which remains low, partly attributed to limited data availability, And because climate finance in industry is particularly hard to track as its processes are prone to confidentiality restrictions; and fourth, 'other & cross-sectoral' activities including water and wastewater projects.*
8. *Africa's Pulse: Analysis of Issues Shaping Africa's Future, World Bank, April 2022.*
9. *Smita Nakhoda, Alice Caravani and Neil Bird, Overseas Development Institute and Liane Schalatek (2011) Climate Finance Policy Brief: Climate Finance in Sub-Saharan Africa, Heinrich Böll Stiftung North America November 2011.*
10. *U Alberto Nardelli, Jorge Valero, and Daryna Krasnolutska; Ukraine Puts Its Immediate Funding Needs at Up to \$65 Billion, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-04/ukraine-estimates-immediate-funding-needs-of-up-to-65-billion>, Accessed 27 August 2022*
11. *In the technology transfer for clean energy production, the abolition of intellectual property rights becomes imperative if Africa is to avoid being left behind in the green energy transition.*
12. *Smita Nakhoda, Alice Caravani and Neil Bird (2011), Climate Finance in Sub-Saharan Africa, Climate Finance Policy Brief, Overseas Development Institute and Liane Schalatek, Heinrich Böll Stiftung North America,*



way developed countries have treated the issue of financing Africa's energy transition. The bulk of EU [European Union] climate finance to Africa comes in the form of loans. This is problematic because it means the EU can profit from climate change, a problem which it contributed to creating."<sup>13</sup>

It is increasingly apparent that Africa-West relations on energy transition will not work if they are driven by a neoliberal financial system built on extensive subsidies, externalisation of costs, and corruption. We cannot achieve a just transition using neoliberal tools. "The real struggle for Africa, it seems, is how to overturn the capitalist patriarchal system promoted and protected by the global financial institutions, corporations, and the global elite who want to control and direct the trajectory of the energy transition based on profit, further marginalisation, and poverty. Africa will need to assert the fact that it is a victim of developed countries' bad energy policies over centuries, and that the funding promised to Africa should not be seen as an act of charity or philanthropy but as fair reparation for the damage done.

### Hear all Voices: a people-centred just energy transition

The International Energy Agency estimates that out of Africa's 1.4 billion people 600 million people are still without electricity and 1 billion have no access to clean cooking energy. Lack of access to electricity is one of the causes of poverty in Africa. There are concerns that this poor population could again be left out as we make the transition to new forms of energy. Green energy powered by the sun and wind is giving hope to millions of people in Africa, because such energy of proximity, if well managed, could reach them. It seems that there is a need to define what a just energy transition means and what it will look like in the eyes of the rural poor. Defining a just transition in the African context will allow African governments to align the NDCs to national development plans.

Currently most of the NDCs are simply wish lists with no connection to national development plans.

There are concerns about how Africa can achieve a just energy transition within a system that does not include the voice of poor, mostly rural populations, who are also the most exposed to climate change impacts. Generally, at the climate talks, the voices of those most affected by the climate crisis, especially women and young people, are not part of the conversation despite recent overtures to the youth climate movement. There are fears that without the poor and marginalised taking part in the energy transition discussions to advance and protect their rights to access energy and define how they would like to access it; they will simply be excluded in the same way that the current economic system has excluded them. Any energy transition negotiations that do not include the people's voice will not be just and fair. They run the risk of reproducing the current energy model that excludes most people.

The bulk of EU climate finance to Africa comes in the form of loans. There is a need for a power shift where people (and not the market) become the drivers of the change, and the designers of how energy transition should happen and how resources should be distributed. When it is the market that drives the energy transition, it creates a gap between governments and the grassroots and increases corporate capture of African governments and public institutions. These constitute serious obstacles to the securing of climate justice for African people.

A just energy transition in the perspective of most Africans is about a balanced approach that encourages collaboration, compromise, and willingness to consider all sides of an argument. It is about putting people at the centre of the transition. It is a transition that does not leave anyone behind socially or economically. As such, energy transition in the African context is not simply a move away from one source of energy to another; it is an opportunity to establish fairness and justice in the

13. Masego Madzwamuse, Keynote speech at the 3rd African Philanthropy Conference, Johannesburg, 2-4th August 2022 The largest cumulative emissions have come from the United States, European countries, China, and Russia. Even though they have all pledged to zero-out their emissions in the decades ahead, at COP26 they softened their language on coal usage, and the US played a role in accepting that weaker position, calling into question other nations' short-term commitment to curb coal.

distribution of economic benefits, including access to electricity. The president of Senegal and president of the African Union, Macky SALL, recently suggested that “We must reach an agreement on a fair energy transition for Africa and this discussion must take place in Sharm el-Sheikh [in Egypt].” The question is how would African elites even know what a fair and just energy transition is when they have not engaged with the poor and the excluded to hear their position? Most African leaders will enter COP27 without having consulted sufficiently with the people who they purport to represent — the rural poor who are most directly affected by climate change. These are the people who must define what a just energy transition means and looks like. Solving the climate crisis will require leaders to consider all perspectives, including those of the marginalised. For most African communities who have never had access to electricity, telling them about clean energy sounds superfluous — what they want is access to energy now.

Free prior and informed consent (FPIC) becomes relevant in the context of the energy transition. FPIC will provide an opportunity for public and social control of the transition to renewable energy by community-based cooperatives. A people-centred approach will ensure that the benefits and costs involved in the transformation of our energy system are distributed fairly and in a way that protects the most vulnerable in society. Therefore, the long walk to a just energy transition requires mass education of African people and policymakers, the vigorous assertion of people’s rights, and the search for real alternatives, including changes to social and political structures and systems.

Africa is the continent with solutions to the climate change crisis. First, Africa has the second largest tropical forest (in the DRC) with a peatland that holds 30 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. Second, Africa captures 40 percent of world solar radiation (although only 1 percent of solar energy capacity is in Africa). Third, Africa has great potential to generate wind energy both on land and sea. And fourth, Africa has the power to produce all transition-critical minerals (cobalt, lithium, manganese, etc...).

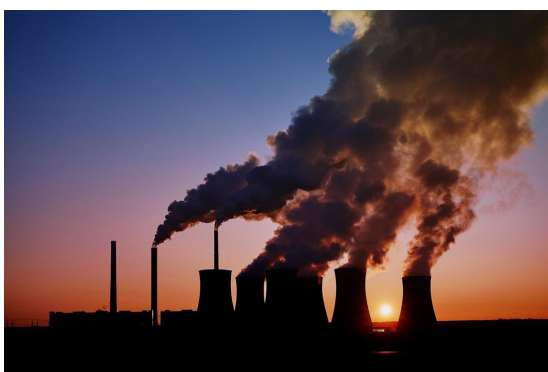
It does not make sense that people who are the owners of all these resources are deprived of full

access to energy and the economic benefits it brings. Since the energy transition is currently being driven by capital, there is a high risk that the pursuit of benefits for a few will dominate the discourse and that poor people will be left out again. A people-centred energy transition will therefore not happen without a fight, where people’s movements will have to stand up and demand equity in the distribution of the benefits of green energy. For this to happen communities must develop a shared understanding of the pertinent issues on energy transition to be able to propose collective community actions. The only way to circumvent capitalism is for communities to turn the energy transition into one of their struggles to demand a complete change of the current economic system. Capitalism has been extraordinarily destructive. The demand is for a new growth model which will avoid the failures of the current system. The community struggle will have to be orientated towards replacing a system that has damaged the environment and increased inequality and poverty. The energy transition is an opportunity to rethink economic strategies. There is a need to force those currently driving the energy transition in Africa and globally to recognise the strategic importance of working with communities, listening to them, learning from them, understanding their needs, and working together to find solutions.

*“For communities that have been excluded from the current energy model, and who are most recipient of the adverse impact of climate change the struggle is not just about energy access, it is also about achieving justice and redress in relation to the adverse impacts of coal mining.”*

Communities must demand and agitate for redress, justice, and equity. The point this paper makes is that a just transition must be built on an inclusive, participatory, and democratic process with communities as key stakeholders. Community activism is critical to challenge existing power relations and to mobilize for a radically just transition. With increasing mobilisation and education happening at ground level, African people are saying that a people-centred energy transition is only possible when people’s voices are heard and included in the solutions.

# Is Africa postponing decarbonisation?



Ahead of COP27, a debate is raging on African governments' united position not to abandon fossil fuels in the immediate future. Increasingly, linked to the West's inability or unwillingness to finance Africa's energy transition and the economic and social realities, it is being asked in different forms whether Africa can afford to 'strand' its fossil fuels? There are two distinct viewpoints. One is in favour of continuing with fossil fuels. It is dominated by African governments with tacit support from the West.<sup>14</sup> The other is against fossil fuels and is dominated by civil society organisations. There is a huge disagreement between the two groups on how to deal with the energy transition on the continent.

## African governments' position

The African governments' position is contained in the African Union (AU) Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action. In this plan, African governments argue that

*"Africa will continue to deploy all forms of its abundant energy resources including renewable and non-renewable energy to address energy demand. Natural gas, green and low carbon hydrogen and nuclear energy will therefore be expected to play a crucial role in expanding modern energy access in the short to medium term while enhancing the uptake of renewables in the long term for low carbon and climate-resilient trajectory."<sup>15</sup>*

For African governments, the sudden abandonment of fossil fuels as a main source of energy and a key foreign exchange earner will be detrimental to African economies and development. Ninety percent of African countries depend on primary commodities, either for state revenues or exports, and two-thirds are dependent on minerals. This position is a 180-degree U-turn from their commitment to

14. The largest cumulative emissions have come from the United States, European countries, China, and Russia. Even though they have all pledged to zero-out their emissions in the decades ahead, at COP26 they softened their language on coal usage, and the US played a role in accepting that weaker position, calling into question other nations' short-term commitment to curb coal.

15. The AU Press Statement of The 41st Ordinary Session of the Executive Council adopted the African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Transition, on 15 July 2022, <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220722/africa-speaks-unified-voice-au-executive-council-adopts-african-common>.

the Paris Agreement and to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) confirming their commitment to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. The African position is being promoted at the same time as the EU is making similar policy decisions. Increasingly, confronted by economic and social realities, African governments are resisting the abandonment of fossil fuels, just as the Europeans are rethinking the pathway in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war. Some EU states have decided to recommission thermal energy plants and Japan's decision to re-activate nuclear power plants. The risk of stranded assets presents a major policy issue for the African continent due to its dependence on natural resources.<sup>16</sup> With the EU facing similar challenges, it is possible to see Africa and the EU conniving to argue in favour of gas as a transitional source of energy. If there are buyers for the continent's fossil fuels, they will remain economically viable commodities. African nations' appetite for exploiting untouched gas reserves contradicts UN Secretary General António Guterres' repeated calls for phasing out fossil fuels, including gas. The UN Secretary General sees investing in new fossil fuel infrastructure as "moral and economic madness."<sup>17</sup> However, we have not seen an uproar from the UN Secretary General on the EU position around gas. The problem with global institutions is that they are biased in favour of the West. When the EU argues for more gas and oil in the wake of the Ukraine-Russia war, UN institutions keep quiet; when Africans make the same proposition, they are rebuked. According to Gwede Mantashe, South African Minister of Minerals and Energy,

*"We have noticed with interest the fact that when Britain, China, India, Australia, ran into an energy crisis, they all agreed to coal generation. We noticed that when they talk to us, they say stop using coal immediately, that is an issue that we must discuss without fear."<sup>19</sup>*

For Alex Benkenstein "it is this type of procrastination that has resulted in South Africa's energy crisis. South Africa has been too slow to invest massively in renewable energy."<sup>18</sup> For Benkenstein "the South African energy crisis is manufactured; it's a crisis that has emerged out of failures in planning and failures to make tough political decisions at the right time for the country."

African governments are asserting their right to use fossil fuels – and gas in particular – for several more decades.<sup>20</sup> The future of gas was also the key issue at the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) forum held in Kigali, Rwanda, in May 2022. The Kigali meeting published a seven-point communique<sup>21</sup> in which participants called on the international community to "support Africa in the deployment of gas as a transition fuel and the long-term displacement of gas by renewable energy and green hydrogen for industrial development, if financially and technically sustainable."<sup>22</sup> This, they said, would help "address development gaps" and "put Africa on a pathway to economic prosperity and net zero". Surprisingly, Amina Mohammed, Deputy UN Secretary (supported by head of SE4All, Damilola Ogunbiyi who attended the meeting) went against her boss by supporting the African governments' position. She argues that

16. *Can Africa Afford to 'Strand' its Fossil Fuels?* <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/can-africa-afford-strand-its-fossil-fuels-30276>, accessed 05 08 2022

17.

18. Alex Benkenstein, speech at the webinar organised by South Africa Trust on Just Energy Transition and Climate sustainability. July 2022

19. Alex Benkenstein, speech at the webinar organised by South Africa Trust on Just Energy Transition and Climate sustainability

20. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/05/27/climate-africa-wants-to-exploit-its-fossil-fuel-for-many-more-decades\\_5984870\\_124.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/05/27/climate-africa-wants-to-exploit-its-fossil-fuel-for-many-more-decades_5984870_124.html).

21. *The Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, and Zimbabwe signed on to the statement.*

22. Chloé Farand, *African nations' dash for gas exposes division at the UN and 'hypocrisy' in Europe*, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/05/25/african-nations-dash-for-gas-exposes-division-at-the-un-and-hypocrisy-in-europe/>, 25/05/2022. Accessed 7/08/2022.

23. *Ibid*



*“Gas, in Africa, probably must be part of the equation for a bit longer as a transitional fuel because gas also affects cooking. It’s going to be very strange to tell the whole of Africa ‘don’t use gas because it’s a fossil [fuel] and continue using fuel wood’.”<sup>23</sup>*

She further argues that “If people that don’t have electricity in Africa got powered by gas today, it would increase Africa’s... emissions by 2-4%. So, it’s not fair to keep identifying Africa’s fossils as the problem.”<sup>24</sup>

For South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, “a one-size-fits-all approach to complex issues such as a transition from fossil fuels that disregards the realities in Africa are not practical or equitable.”<sup>25</sup>

The African governments’ position should not have come as a surprise. Since signing the Paris Agreement, African governments have not taken steps to decrease their fossil fuels footprint; on the contrary they have been increasing production, new projects are coming on stream, and they have been expanding geological research to find new reserves. Across Africa, gas is at the heart of a development versus decarbonisation challenge. African governments, despite their commitment, have not acted in accordance with the Paris Agreement.

The case of South Africa is key to understanding why African governments have not rushed to act on their commitments. Coal provides about 77 percent of the country’s primary energy and is also the country’s single biggest export, registering \$8 billion in offshore sales in 2019.<sup>26</sup> Coal is important not only for electricity production but also for jobs. The country is experiencing an electricity crisis, with demand for electricity exceeding supply. The only way that that can currently be managed in the short term is through load-shedding.<sup>27</sup> So, the question of transitioning towards renewable energies is a critical issue for government and communities in the context

of extremely high rates of inequality, unemployment, and poverty. Abandoning coal without a strong alternative energy source could be a recipe for social, economic, and political disaster.

The indecisiveness about whether or not to abandon fossil fuels is not unique to Africa. It also affects developed countries, as both consumers and producers. Following the Ukraine-Russia war, the latter has reduced its provision of gas to the EU, and the EU has been looking for alternative sources of coal, oil and gas to keep its lights on.<sup>28</sup> Africa has been identified as one of the continents that can help the EU by-pass Russia’s gas dominance. For geopolitical reasons the EU and the USA have been encouraging African fossil fuel producers—South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana-- to increase their production. Most EU countries have restarted their coal industries to generate electricity. The USA also has increased its coal export to EU. For example, Senegalese president Macky SALL is said to be excited at the German government’s decision to invest in liquefied natural gas (LNG) production and export to Europe.<sup>29</sup> The EU and the USA coal and gas gas exploitation will violate their pledge made at COP26 to end international public finance for unabated fossil fuels, including gas, by the end of this year. The West for their interest alone are renegading on their commitment and responsibility to cut big emissions. Europe’s U-turn on its energy transition commitment exposes its selfishness and self-aggrandisement. So, African governments are being encouraged in their decision by European and American attitudes toward fossil fuels. This western attitude should be a clear signal to Africa that it has also to protect its interests at all costs. And the question that has been posed by Ovigwe Eguegu “If Europe is using gas as a transition fuel or for political calculations, why shouldn’t we?” finds its full resonance in this circumstance, and Africa’s ministers are correct to raise the stakes by threatening to also use gas for the foreseeable future as a source of energy.

24. Chloé Farand, *ibid*

25. Statement made at the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) convened on the 6th of February 2022 in preparation for the COP27 and to deliberate on the outcomes of the Glasgow Climate Conference held in 2021 and the implications for Africa.

26. Steve Fiscor “Coal Remains Vital to South African Economy” <https://www.coalage.com/features/coal-remains-vital-to-south-african-economy/>.

27. When loadshedding reaches stage six (you’re talking about up to three loads three power cuts of about two) the financial cost to the economy is estimated at 180 million dollars a day.

28. The EU countries are scrambling to secure gas supplies from other sources.

29. Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Germany would “intensively” work to support offshore gas production in Senegal – a project developed by BP and embroiled in a corruption scandal.

## Civil society's position

For civil society groups, it is madness for African leaders to continue to increase fossil fuel extraction at a time when “scientists reveal they now have ample evidence that climate change could lead to worldwide societal collapse or even human extinction even with modest levels of warming.”<sup>30</sup> For civil society it is possible for African countries with the right leadership to make the transition from fossil fuels. The environmental and social benefits of moving quickly towards renewable energy clearly outweigh those of fossil fuels. Renewable energy technologies can help deliver energy services to millions of previously excluded African communities fast and cheaply.

Civil society is clear, Africa should not be distracted by EU short-term plans. For its own interest, the EU is turning its back on the Paris Agreement and is forcing Africa to increase fossil fuel production to meet its current short-term needs in energy. Civil society warns that this EU appetite for fossil fuels will stop immediately when it achieves full domestic productive capacity in green energy, and there will not be a market for Africa's stranded assets. Western countries are prosperous enough to pay for policies that can place them on the path to net-zero emissions by mid-century. Africa's fossil fuels are dependent on western and Chinese markets and investment. Africa does not have the infrastructure to consume its own gas or oil; much of the gas and oil production under development in Africa is destined for export. As the Africa Development Bank suggests, “Some assets will be “stranded”<sup>31</sup> due to changes in markets and investment flows as global extractive companies and investors adjust their portfolios to meet new low-carbon regulations.”<sup>32</sup> Also, Africa's extractive assets are at risk due to changing consumer demand,

such as the growing use of solar energy and electric vehicles in developed countries.

It stands to reason that fossil fuels like gas and coal are not the future. The EU, once it has its renewables up to speed, it will drop these new gas and coal agreements, it is signing with developing countries. Evidently, as soon as the West achieves full capacity in green energy, Africa's gas and coal will be dumped and automatically become stranded unless African governments have integrated in their policy to rapidly start to process and consume these resources on the continent. However, this does not seem to be a priority for African leaders. They are eying immediate revenues rather than providing energy to people. The example of Mozambique is revealing where foreign companies have built a \$20bn offshore natural gas field and onshore liquefied natural gas facility, which will be exported in a country where 70 percent of the population still lives without access to electricity. It is, therefore, important for Africans to reflect without emotion on what is good for Africa at this juncture. For civil society, like the young Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate, “...gas exploration and gas-fired power infrastructure in Africa are robbing us of vital time to switch to clean energy.”<sup>33</sup> For Mohamed Adow, director of Power Shift Africa, “For Africa, it would be idiotic to invest our little resources to expand gas production just to help Europe in the short term when we could be investing in our own sustainable renewable energy.”<sup>34</sup>

For civil society, Africa should not waste time and resources on fossil fuels. Instead, it should focus on renewable energy for which it has a comparative advantage and could become a global leader in energy provision. First, the continent has in abundance all the critical minerals needed to electrify the transport system. So, Africa should focus on

30. “Damian Carrington (2022), *Climate endgame: risk of human extinction ‘dangerously underexplored’* The Guardian, Mon 1 Aug 2022

31. “Stranded assets” are natural resources, like minerals, that have suffered from unanticipated or premature write-downs, devaluation or conversion to liabilities even before their exploration, causing potential market failure.

32. Can Africa Afford to ‘Strand’ its Fossil Fuels? <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/can-africa-afford-strand-its-fossil-fuels-30276>, Accessed, 28/08/2022

33. Vanessa Nakate, *Gas is a dangerous distraction for Africa*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2022/5/16/gas-is-a-dangerous-distraction-for-africa>, Accessed 28/08/2022

34. *African nations' dash for gas exposes division at the UN and ‘hypocrisy’ in Europe*, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2022/05/25/african-nations-dash-for-gas-exposes-division-at-the-un-and-hypocrisy-in-europe/>, Accessed 17/08/2022



the promotion of beneficiation and value addition to these critical minerals to secure a locally driven energy transition. In fact, Africa has the producer power for all critical minerals needed to secure the energy transition (cobalt, graphite, lithium, nickel, zinc, manganese). Without Africa's minerals, it is practically impossible today to achieve the energy transition. Climate change has opened an opportunity for Africa to make a paradigm shift from a model where it exports raw materials to a model where it produces, and exports finished goods. Second, Africa receives 40 percent of world sun energy. This is a great opportunity to lead in solar energy. Research shows that renewable energy costs are falling<sup>35</sup> and will continue to fall, which is good for poor communities. Quickly ramping up the use of wind and solar power will expand energy reach to people previously excluded, reduce the cost of energy for households, and create new jobs. It is no longer refutable that a renewable energy revolution could unlock Africa's social and economic development. What is more exciting with renewable energy is that it will not need major infrastructure to reach remote communities. It provides opportunities for "localised and resource-efficient energy options like decentralised, community-owned local solar, wind

and biomass projects."<sup>36</sup> This approach will resolve a major headache for African governments: how to provide energy to rural households, local producers, and women – including social services such transport, health, education, and childcare.

It is opportunistic for African governments to insist on fossil fuel production because past and current production has never benefited the African people. The benefits of fossil fuels are misappropriated in large part by corporations through illicit financial flows and tax evasion, leaving African governments with peanuts which is then misappropriated by political elites. All over Africa people are being negatively affected by fossil fuel extraction through pollution and eviction. The extraction of fossil fuels has never advanced people's access to electricity. In areas where fossil fuel is extracted there is seldom any development for communities. Instead, communities are the recipients of environmental destruction and human rights violations. The fossil fuel economy is only good for the African elites and for foreign corporations, and not for the African people.

It is also important for African leaders to understand that fossil fuels will not meet African demands for electricity. With the population in sub-Saharan Africa expected to grow from 1 billion in 2018 to more than 2 billion in 2050, the demand for electricity is projected to expand 3 percent a year.<sup>37</sup> The sources of energy will need to change if Africa is to provide sustainable and clean energy to its people. As Alex Benkenstein from the South African Institute of International Affairs puts it,

35. <https://rmi.org/clean-energy-has-won-the-economic-race/>.

36. *Can Africa Afford to 'Strand' its Fossil Fuels?* <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/can-africa-afford-strand-its-fossil-fuels-30276>, accessed 05 08 2022.

37. Gregor Schwerhoff and Mouhamadou Sy, "Where the Sun Shines: Renewable energy sources, especially solar, are ideal for meeting Africa's electrical power needs".

38. Alex Benkenstein, speech at the webinar organised by South Africa Trust on Just Energy Transition and Climate sustainability. July 2022

*“The current energy crisis is enough reason for the country to invest in renewable energy since coal has failed to serve the people and the economy of the country... if South Africa had added five gigawatts of renewable energy production in place by 2021 that could have prevented about 95 per cent of the load shedding that the country experienced last year.”<sup>39</sup>*

### Is it possible to find a middle ground?

A key question is whether Africa can do both – invest in gas and invest in green energy? A solution to this question could be found in the middle, where Africa is allowed to continue extracting fossil fuels from current projects that are in operation without investing in new coal or gas exploration permits and is simultaneously supported to invest massively in renewable energy. It is clear when you consider all parameters – economic, financial, and social – that the continent is not ready to suddenly shift completely from fossil fuel energy.

The argument by the president of Senegal (and president of the AU), Macky SALL, that “Africa must be able to exploit its large gas reserves for another 20 or 30 years to further its development and provide access to electricity to the 600 million people who are

still deprived”<sup>39</sup> is only reasonable and acceptable if Africa limits fossil fuel production to projects already in operation, without investing in new projects. A position on active projects to be allowed to continue could have the sympathy of the world. This would not be exceptional to Africa; China has also promised that it will not build new coal power plants. This is in some way in line with the African common position which encourages striking a balance between ensuring access to electricity to catalyse the much-needed socio-economic growth in Africa and smoothly transitioning towards an energy system based on renewable and clean energy sources matching the ambitions of Agenda 2063.

If African leaders are looking at fossil fuels beyond projects already in operation, then they will be disappointed because they do not control either the investment, the production, or the market. Firstly, the investment which is expected for oil and gas production is foreign.<sup>40</sup> This investment might not materialise and can be withdrawn at any time. Secondly, Africa is dependent on external markets to sell its oil and gas. These markets will soon be reduced as western countries improve their green energy capacity. There is also price volatility which Africa does not control. While the process of abandoning fossil fuels must be incremental, Africa will have to abandon fossil fuels at some stage, and it needs to turn its full attention and resources onto a more secure energy mix.

39. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/05/27/climate-africa-wants-to-exploit-its-fossil-fuel-for-many-more-decades\\_5984870\\_124.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2022/05/27/climate-africa-wants-to-exploit-its-fossil-fuel-for-many-more-decades_5984870_124.html).

40. African governments are under pressure from gas companies that continue to pitch gas as a reliable and cleaner alternative to coal.

# Achieving energy transition through domestic resource mobilisation and regional integration



Domestic resource mobilisation, philanthropy, and regional integration are key to Africa's energy transition. Africa must push for economic policies that enable governments to earn sufficient revenues so that they have enough funds to look after their populations without the need for handouts from the West. Domestic resource mobilisation therefore becomes essential to securing a locally driven energy transition. This is where African philanthropy and Africa's private sector can really play a role. Both can invest in technology that supports Africa's

local efforts for self-sufficient green energy. African philanthropy must position itself to help the continent take advantage of near-term as well as future opportunities.<sup>41</sup> The problem of Africa is not finances, it is technology. "African governments can potentially mobilise more of their domestic resources to cover the initial capital costs of renewable energy... Use of carbon taxation could boost tax revenue while reducing fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions."<sup>42</sup> The Africa Climate Change Foundation argues that "Africa's potential to meaningfully contribute to lowering emissions, both current and future, will lie in its ability to catalyse economic diversification and enhance competitiveness through clean technologies."<sup>43</sup>

There is room to encourage the private sector in South-South cooperation and pan Africanism to push African countries and other developing countries to consider furthering their cooperation and collaboration in renewable energy. Audacity is needed. Mobilisation of adequate financing, accelerating regional integration to create large

41. Madzwamuse. Keynote speech at the 3rd African Philanthropy Conference, Johannesburg, 2-4th August 2022

42. *Ibid.*

43. ACF Press Release, AFRICAN CLIMATE FOUNDATION URGE LEADERS TO PRIORITISE CLIMATE CHANGE DURING SIXTH AU-EU SUMMIT, 15 February 2022 <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220206/african-leaders-push-adequate-financial-and-technical-support-address-climate> Accessed 07/08/2022.

44. Can Africa Afford to 'Strand' its Fossil Fuels? <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/can-africa-afford-strand-its-fossil-fuels-30276>, accessed 05 08 2022.



markets for energy development, harmonisation of policies and regulatory frameworks, and encouraging technology transfer and capacity building are among the pillars of implementation of the common position to accelerate energy access and just transition on the continent. There is a need for regional cooperation through existing mechanisms on mineral-based development, trade, and economic integration, such as the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).<sup>44</sup> The AfCFTA is an opportunity to attract investment to secure a climate-resilient future by spurring a broad mix of clean technologies — including electric vehicles and related infrastructure, super-efficient heat pumps, green hydrogen, and fast-growing renewables — while lowering day-to-day costs of energy and transportation.

*“AfCFTA will, in many ways, improve on the free movement of labour as it is built on existing [Regional Economic Communities] RECs modalities on cross border movement. Overall, the implication of lowering the barriers to labour movement could lead to an expansion in the human and skilled labour available for green energy transition. The increase of competition that regional integration creates could also push country's domestic policies towards more efficient sectors and reallocate resources from unproductive activities like subsidies for fossil fuels.”<sup>45</sup>*

For philanthropy or the African private sector to come on board and support the energy transition, African governments must make substantial efforts to do away with governance-related risks — complex bureaucracy, changing regulation, and corruption. African countries must create financial systems that promote and facilitate clean energy options, including by supporting subsidies, facilitated loans, research and development.

# Gender and the just energy transition pathway in Africa

One critical variable in the debate on energy transition is how gender perspectives have been considered. Placing gender as a prominent issue in the just transition conversation is critical for the success of the energy transition in Africa. In much of the literature on gender, energy and climate change, women have been categorised as vulnerable groups and victims in need of protection from climate change risks. If the energy transition is going to be just, it would need to have a strong gender inclination. Put differently, when assessing the climate change crisis and the energy transition, it is imperative to apply gendered lenses on how most Africans (women and girls in particular) are shaping and impacting on the energy transition discourse.



The climate change crisis and energy projects make the situation for rural women particularly precarious. The green energy revolution is being rolled out across parts of the region in a way that does not

benefit women and their communities. Most of the time these projects are privately owned, and they are usually for profit. The energy produced does not benefit a woman on the ground; it goes to the elite in urban areas, to mining companies, and to industry. It excludes people from the benefits of their repossessed land. In this case green energy is not much different to the dirty energy projects (coal, oil and gas) which also displace women from their land and limit women's access to energy, to water, and to livelihoods. The very people who most need access to clean energy are being left out. The challenge for the energy transition process is how to ensure that women's voices are heard and are fully represented. Most people in Africa are still rural-based, and most of the peasant farmers are woman. The relationship between women and land in the rural setting exposes them more to the impact of climate change than any other group. Women's gender-prescribed roles in the rural community have made them collectors of water and wood for cooking, and food providers through farming. Energy consumption itself is a gendered issue, because of the traditional roles that men and women occupy. Both genders use energy, but in noticeably different ways. Women and girls in particular are expected to venture out in search of natural energy sources such as wood and cooking fuels. They must dedicate a large part of their waking hours to collecting fuel, while opening themselves up to safety risks as well as facing health risks due to inhalation of these fuels. (African Development Fund, 3). Access to secure, sustainable and clean

46. USAID. "Empowering and Powering Women | Power Africa | U.S. Agency For." USAID, 5 Apr. 2022, [www.usaid.gov/powerafrica/gender](http://www.usaid.gov/powerafrica/gender).

47. Madzwamuse, Keynote speech at the 3rd Philanthropy conference, Johannesburg from 2-4 August 2022.

energy will immensely contribute to the upward mobility of rural women “through socio-economic strata and can break generational poverty scenarios while simultaneously creating generational wealth scenarios.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the challenges of energy transition should “intersect with the need to define a clear pathway for clean, prosperous development that is rooted in equity and justice.”<sup>47</sup>

Women understand quite fundamentally how we are connected to nature. They also understand how we need to live in harmony with nature. Women (and particularly women peasant farmers across the African region) understand these relationships and interdependencies. When land is grabbed and other resources are stolen by extractors (often by large dirty energy projects) this tends to impact profoundly on women and their communities.<sup>48</sup> It is not just that women are unable to provide for their families, but they also do not benefit from the meagre compensation payments for the loss of land that men capture as dictated by patriarchal norms. Women have a relationship to land that they don't own; the land is usually owned by men or by traditional leaders (who are also men).

It is important to recognise that if there is a group that needs to be prioritised in terms of access to green energy it is rural women who currently depend on charcoal, with all its environmental and health costs.<sup>49</sup> There are initiatives being set up to empower women, such as the International Finance Corporation's Women in Renewable Energy in Africa Network (W-REA),<sup>50</sup> but these initiatives focus on professional women in sub-Saharan Africa's renewable energy sector and not rural women. Rural women are excluded; nothing exists to empower rural women to have their voices heard and to participate in the provision and control of green energy.

*“A direct way to ensure greater inclusion of women in the energy sector is by adapting and creating policies and regulations by national governments, financial institutions, donors, and other actors to require a certain percentage of women's participation in new energy sector endeavors and investments. These policies and regulations must be accompanied by tight and comprehensive measures of support that improve access to financial, technical, and capacity building measures for any and all women seeking to participate in the energy sector, as well as comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting to discern progress in adherence to these gender-based requirements.”<sup>51</sup>*

If Africa aspires to a holistic development, the inclusion of rural women in energy transition discussions and solutions is essential. There is an urgent need to stop a green energy revolution embedded in the ideologies of the existing modern economy and patriarchal systems that exclude and marginalise women. The transition therefore is not just about energy, it is also about the move away from existing systems that are causing harm to women in rural areas. As we recognise gender as an issue in the just energy transition, we also need to make efforts to answer the immediate cultural, socio-economic, and political problems facing women as essential in reaching a truly gender and energy equal society.

Research has shown that gender-based violence (GBV) decreases when households have access to sustainable energy. According to the African Centre for a Green Economy, “This theory is based on the understanding that electricity increases women's access to information through televisions and radios,

48. Trusha Reddy, speech at the webinar organised by South Africa Trust on Just Energy Transition and Climate sustainability. July 2022

49. Ibid

50. W-REA strives to bolster women's participation in leadership and employment in the renewable energy sector through networking, mentoring, advocacy, and leadership training. For more information about eligibility and how to nominate a woman to the group, this link can be followed or one can contact Anne N Kabugi at [akabugi@ifc.org](mailto:akabugi@ifc.org). (IFC)

51. Trusha Reddy,, speech at the webinar organised by South Africa Trust on Just Energy Transition and Climate sustainability. July 2022

which exposes them to various global views on issues around GBV. This thinking is also supported by the view that with more information, women are enlightened and empowered to defend their rights and guard themselves against any form of violence. This also quickens and makes GBV response measures more feasible especially to women in rural areas.” (CGE)

The impact on women and their communities of an energy transition reinforced by patriarchal norms leaves women’s voices out of decision-making around the energy transition. By ensuring that women’s voices are heard as we implement the energy

transition, we are also redressing other injustices. We need to frame the energy challenge from a gender or a feminist perspective. We need to address the issues of ownership of land and other resources so that it is not privately held but is in the hands of those who grow the food and are closest to the land.

Through a truly just energy transition, women will attain improved health, which benefits the well-being of entire communities. Accessible clean energy will also create increased opportunities for women to acquire education and pursue income-generating activities.

## Conclusion



Africa finds itself at a crossroad in the climate change discourse. On the one hand, Africa has polluted less than any other continent and it is most vulnerable<sup>52</sup> to the impacts of climate change; on the other hand, it lacks the finances and technology to respond effectively. Africa, after slavery and colonialism (which interrupted and often reversed its development), is again facing another externally driven obstacle to its survival. The debate of the last decade has been on how Africa, the least developed and the least polluting continent, could be supported in abandoning a development path based on carbon emissions for one powered by green energy.

This paper has demonstrated the willingness of Africa, despite being a victim of the climate crisis created by others, to step up through its commitment to the Paris Agreement to the challenge of contributing to addressing the global climate crisis that respects no borders. This commitment is being undermined by the West's slow pace in disbursing finances to support the energy transition. The economic and social

realities in which African people are living without access to electricity are pushing African leaders to reconsider their commitment to abandoning fossil fuels. While this position is counterproductive (and possibly even suicidal) in the medium and long term, it seems to be justified when those who caused the climate crisis are themselves not ready to abandon fossil fuels.

Africa must understand that developed countries are not interested in achieving collective prosperity. They will advance their interests in each circumstance as they have always done. While calls are made to work through the international system to resolve the common problems, the global system is so divided around power and domination that it is difficult to see a cohesive and effective international community rising to the challenge of climate change.

This paper argues that there is a need for African leaders to think strategically on the future of the continent's energy supply. In line with the civil society position, it will be important not to look at the short-term opportunities and gains that fossil fuels may bring. The abundance of resources needed to achieve energy transition (solar power, wind, and transition-critical minerals) provide Africa with a comparative advantage over all the other regions. What Africa now needs is a mind-shift away from waiting for the West to come to its rescue to finding local solutions. The energy transition isn't a job for some outside saviours, but a process that must unfold from the inside out. Some very decisive decisions are therefore needed from African leaders.

52. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that by 2020, crop yields from rain-fed agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) may fall by up to 50 per cent, and 75-250 million people could be affected by increased water shortages. SSA is already highly susceptible to droughts, which are linked to decreases in agricultural yields and, in turn, increases in food prices. Subsistence farmers, the majority of whom are women, are likely to be particularly affected.



Africa needs to bring together its intelligentsia, philanthropists and the private sector to rapidly consider and design local solutions to the energy transition. These local solutions will involve African supply chains through investments in advanced knowledge, new technological solutions, and manufacturing. This is key to ensuring that Africa has its electric vehicle manufacturing plants, renewable energy resources, heat pumps, batteries, and storage, which will create millions of new jobs and help to revitalise Africa as a whole, positioning it as an important global power and narrowing the gap with western powers and China in the clean energy race. It will make Africa less dependent on foreign technologies and manufactured goods. Despite this call for a locally driven energy transition, Africa must continue to demand reparation from the West through adequate financial and technical support to address the havoc that climate change is causing to Africa and its people.

In promoting a locally driven energy transition the voice of Africans (and especially of the poor) must be part of the discussion and the solutions. We need to amplify the people's voices, build partnerships, and expand climate education. By meeting the needs of women through a transition to just and accessible energy, entire communities will attain improved health and well-being.

Africa must guide its energy transition in a way that resists destructive extractivism, through alternative development solutions directly opposite to the current model. The transition should not rely on private sector investment. In its pursuit of profits, this approach will further marginalise the most vulnerable populations. To achieve a just transition, Africa must choose to play a comprehensive and long-term game rather than a limited and short-term one.

