

Conference Memorandum

Just Transition The Global Energy Transition from a Regional Perspective

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Introduction

The conference "Just Transition: The Global Energy Transition from a Regional Perspective," held in Maputo, Mozambique, from October 10 to 13, 2024, brought together an international and interdisciplinary group of academics, policymakers, and practitioners to explore how the global shift toward renewable energy is reshaping resource exporting regions. Hosted by the Pedagogical University of Maputo and organized in collaboration with international partners such as the German Research Foundation (DFG) through the Programme Point Sud, the University of Marburg, the University of Giessen, and the Colombian-German Peace Institute (CAPAZ), the event provided a space for critical dialogues on the political, socioeconomic, and environmental dimensions of a just energy transition.

The conference aimed to broaden the scope of just transition debates, emphasizing the need to incorporate regional and local perspectives from the Global South, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, into global discourses. It questioned the impacts of transitioning to low-carbon energy systems in resource-dependent economies and the socio-environmental challenges that accompany this shift. Through a combination of keynote lectures, panels, and round tables, the event created a platform for interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral dialogue that underscored the need for inclusivity and equity in the energy transition.

The event brought together over 20 participants from a diverse range of countries, including Mozambique, Germany, the UK, South Africa, Kenya, the Netherlands, Portugal, Malawi, Ghana, Uganda and Ethiopia. The event featured contributions from these regions, reflecting the conference's international and interdisciplinary nature spanning from anthropology, geography, economics, social science, and engineering. The university setting enabled students and colleagues from the Pedagogical University of Maputo to join the discussions, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas. Over three days, attendees presented and debated research on key topics such as energy poverty, extractivism, and socio-economic justice issues at stake. The final day included an excursion to the NEER UP Photovoltaic Systems Project from the Pedagogical University of Maputo, where participants toured the facilities, shared insights with local representatives over lunch, and discussed future collaborations within the group.

Just transition - Approaching the topic

The global energy transition, driven by the urgent need to mitigate climate change and ensure energy sovereignty, is reshaping economies and societies across the globe. For the Global South, particularly resource-exporting regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, this transition presents unique challenges and opportunities. These complexities formed the core of discussions at the conference, which sought to explore the political, socioeconomic, and socioenvironmental dimensions of this shift, with a particular emphasis on amplifying underrepresented perspectives from Sub-Saharan Africa. The event aimed to bridge research gaps, foster cross-sector collaboration, and integrate regional realities into the broader global energy transition discourse.

A key focus of the conference was understanding how the global push for low-carbon societies affects resource-dependent economies. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, often heavily reliant on natural resource exports, face a double bind: meeting international demand for critical minerals and energy resources while addressing local socioenvironmental conflicts. This dynamic has led to the intensification of both "green extractivism" and fossil fuel extraction, creating new "sacrifice zones" where local communities disproportionately bear the social and environmental costs of resource exploitation. Participants critically examined these issues, emphasizing the need to confront the contradictions of transitioning to greener energy systems while mitigating the injustices embedded in global supply chains.

Another central theme was energy poverty and energy justice, particularly the stark realities faced by many Sub-Saharan African countries. With significant portions of their populations still lacking access to electricity, the region's energy challenges go beyond merely transitioning from fossil fuels to renewables. The discussions underscored the importance of building clean and equitable energy systems from the outset, avoiding the replication of extractivist and inequitable practices that have historically characterized global energy production. Achieving this requires balancing urgent energy needs with sustainability and inclusivity, a challenge that demands innovative policies and international cooperation.

The conference also addressed the structural challenges faced by extractivist economies. Historical dependencies on resource exports, coupled with colonial legacies, have entrenched economic and political vulnerabilities in many nations. These dependencies complicate efforts to diversify economies and implement just energy transitions. Presentations explored the conditions necessary for overcoming these structural barriers, emphasizing the need for governance frameworks that prioritize equity, sustainability, and long-term economic resilience.

Inclusivity in the global energy transition dialogue was another significant area of focus. Participants highlighted the Northern-centric nature of many existing frameworks and stressed the importance of integrating local and regional perspectives into these debates. This involves fostering equitable, context-sensitive solutions that address the specific needs and priorities of communities in the Global South. By incorporating diverse voices and experiences, the international discourse on just transitions can become more comprehensive and impactful.

To achieve these goals, the conference brought together a diverse group of contributors from disciplines such as anthropology, geography, economics, social science, and engineering. Case studies and theoretical insights illuminated the multifaceted impacts of energy transitions at local and regional levels, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities involved. This interdisciplinary approach was crucial in addressing the complex interplay of technical, social, and political dimensions of the energy transition.

The conference's objectives were ambitious yet clear: to deepen understanding of the regional effects of energy transitions, identify structural conditions necessary for a just transition in resource-dependent economies, and propose frameworks for making global just transition debates more inclusive. It also sought to establish long-lasting partnerships between stakeholders from the Global North and South, as well as within the Global South itself. By focusing on equity-driven strategies and local experiences, the event underscored that sustainable futures require not only technical innovation but also a commitment to justice, inclusivity, and the recognition of diverse regional realities.

Through these discussions, the conference advanced critical debates on how to achieve a truly just energy transition. It reinforced the idea that the global shift toward renewable energy must be guided by principles of equity and sustainability, ensuring that the benefits of the transition are shared widely and that its burdens do not fall disproportionately on vulnerable communities. This holistic approach is essential for crafting pathways to sustainable futures that are both effective and just.

On the conference – Keynotes, panels and round tables

The conference opened with remarks by Dr. Luís Jorge Manuel António Ferrão, Rector of the Pedagogical University of Maputo, alongside Dr. Issa Fofana of the Point Sud Programme, Christine de Barros Said from the German Embassy in Mozambique, and the conveners, Dr. Urânio Stefane Mahanjane and Dr. Michaela Meurer. These introductory remarks set the tone by highlighting the urgency of addressing energy access challenges in Mozambique and the broader region within the context of a just transition.

In Mozambique, one of the most pressing challenges is ensuring electricity access for the entire population, as currently only about 50% of the population has reliable access to power. The country's energy production relies heavily on hydropower, with recent efforts focusing on expanding wind and solar energy infrastructure. At the same time, Mozambique is a significant exporter of energy-related raw materials, particularly natural gas, with major reserves located in the conflict zone in the north. This dual dynamic—addressing local challenges of energy access while playing a critical role in the global energy transition—underscores Mozambique's unique position in the energy landscape. The conference aimed to examine such scenarios, prioritizing the perspectives of countries and regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, to shed light on the interplay between local realities and the global energy transition.

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One of the central themes of the conference was explored in a keynote address by Dr. Amollo Ambole from the University of Nairobi, titled *"Rethinking the Energy Transition with Care at its Core."* Dr. Ambole emphasized that the energy transition should not be framed solely as a technical challenge but as a profound justice issue requiring tough choices and trade-offs. She highlighted the need to prioritize care—for each other, our communities, and the planet—by viewing technology as a tool to foster a care-based society, rather than the sole driver of change. Her address called for a reimagining of energy transitions as opportunities to address inequalities, uplift lives, and heal the environment. Drawing on examples from Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, Dr. Ambole inspired participants to envision a future where justice, community well-being, and sustainability are integral to energy choices, redefining the transition as not merely about reducing carbon emissions but also about addressing deep-rooted inequalities and ensuring community well-being.

The first round table discussion, “*Just Transition – Reflections from Sub-Saharan Africa*,” featured Dr. Evance Mwathunga from the University of Malawi, Dr. Michelle Pressend from the University of Cape Town, and Dr. Simon Bawakyillenuo from the University of Ghana. Moderated by Julia Schwab, this session delved into the complex intersection of energy poverty, socio-environmental conflicts, and equitable development. A recurring theme was the influence of colonial legacies, which have left many African countries locked into extractivist dependencies. Panelists stressed the need for North-South cooperation that prioritizes reparative justice through funding and technology transfers, enabling the Global South to leapfrog extractivist models while addressing the immediate needs of underserved communities. The discussion also called for a recalibration of international frameworks to reflect the disproportionate responsibilities of the Global North in causing and addressing climate change.

The panel “*Changing Perspectives – Different Stakeholders’ Stance on the Energy Transition*” brought together diverse viewpoints on the challenges and opportunities posed by the shift toward sustainable energy systems. Moderated by Marcos Cherinda from UNESCO Maputo, the discussion examined how social, political, and economic dimensions shape the energy transition, with particular focus on justice, intersectionality, and inclusivity. Devan Pillay from the University of Witwatersrand highlighted the importance of a counter-hegemonic, working-class politics, critiquing the dominance of “green capitalism” and advocating for eco-socialist and feminist frameworks that confront the inequalities perpetuated by fossil and green capitalism. Vanesa Castán Broto from the University of Sheffield explored the transformative potential of community energy through an intersectional lens, arguing that addressing structural gender inequalities is crucial for achieving energy justice. Meanwhile, Oliver Johnson from the UK Government Office for Science presented insights on how low-carbon energy technologies intersect with gender and social equity, warning that without addressing underlying structural power imbalances, the energy transition risks replicating existing inequalities. Together, the panelists underscored the need for a holistic approach to the energy transition—one that challenges entrenched power dynamics, prioritizes marginalized voices, and promotes equitable and inclusive practices.

The first day of the conference focused on broad perspectives on the energy transition from Sub-Saharan African scholars, highlighting the complexity and diversity of the topic. Following opening remarks, a keynote address, a roundtable discussion, and a panel provided space for in-depth exploration of these issues. Central themes included the importance of ensuring that the energy transition does not further disadvantage or marginalize vulnerable social groups. Speakers

emphasized the need to consider African-specific relationships between people and the environment, which not only reflect unique contexts but also offer alternative approaches to designing a fairer and more inclusive energy transition. The discussions underscored the multifaceted nature of the challenges and opportunities inherent in transitioning to sustainable energy systems.

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A particularly impactful session on the second day was “*Mapping Extractive Frontiers: Perspectives from Mozambique.*” Moderated by Dr. Michaela Meurer from the University of Marburg, the panel explored Mozambique’s unique position as both a site of significant fossil fuel extraction and a potential leader in renewable energy development. The presenters—Dr. Nikkie Wiegink of Utrecht University, Talassamo Saíde Ali from Rovuma University, and Emilinah Namaganda of Utrecht University—delves into empirical studies that illuminated subnational dynamics often overshadowed by global narratives. Central to the discussion were the planned gas extraction projects and the ongoing violent conflict in Cabo Delgado. Dr. Wiegink analyzed how global narratives shape national resource extraction pathways, while Namaganda and Saíde Ali examined the socio-environmental consequences of hydrocarbon extraction and expanding graphite mining. Together, they emphasized the need for inclusive governance structures to address displacement, ecological degradation, and the broader impacts of extractivist dependencies. The panel highlighted the urgency of confronting the violent legacies of extractivism while envisioning sustainable and equitable alternatives for the region.

The panel “*The Dark Side of the Energy Transition: Perspectives from Beyond Africa,*” moderated by Dr. Stefan Peters from the University of Giessen, offered critical insights into the often-overlooked consequences of the global shift toward renewable energy. Dr. Antonio Maria Pusceddu from CRIA-ISCTE in Portugal examined the contentious creation of internal energy frontiers in Southern Europe, focusing on how the rapid expansion of renewable energy projects can perpetuate inequalities by prioritizing industrial reconfigurations at the expense of rural communities. His case study from Sines highlighted the tensions between national ambitions for a “green economy” and localized socio-environmental justice movements. Julia Schwab from the University of Giessen presented on the double bind of (post)oil futures in Ecuador, where global climate justice discourses and national decarbonization efforts coexist uneasily with the persistence of extractivist logics. She illustrated how the juxtaposition of conservation initiatives and extractive projects creates “conservation islands” that mask deeper inequalities and environmental degradation. Together, the panelists underscored the complexities

and contradictions of energy transitions, revealing how they often reproduce or exacerbate existing inequities, whether through spatial reconfigurations, as in Europe, or through socio-political paradoxes, as in Latin America.

The second round table, *“Just Transition: A Challenge for Policymakers,”* brought together decision-makers and practitioners to discuss how policy can align with the principles of a just energy transition. Moderated by Dr. Urânio Stefane Mahanjane, the session featured Nadia Ouedraogo from the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, Linda Weber of GIZ, Olga Utchavo Madeira of Electricidade de Moçambique, and Dr. Stefan Peters from the CAPAZ Institute. This discussion tackled practical challenges, such as mobilizing financing for renewable energy projects, ensuring that international investments are equitably distributed, and creating pathways for local capacity building. Participants acknowledged that policymaking in resource-dependent countries must navigate a precarious balancing act: meeting immediate developmental needs while advancing long-term sustainability goals.

The second day of the conference delved deeper into specific topics, with a particular focus on the situation in Mozambique, the host country of the event. The day's discussions included a second panel that provided comparative perspectives by examining cases outside the African context. One of the central themes of the day was the challenge of energy transitions for policymaking. Noteworthy moments of shared learning included the increased awareness of the complexity of the situation in Cabo Delgado, a region that not only receives little international attention but is often overlooked even within the southern parts of Mozambique. Another significant highlight was the roundtable discussion on policy-making, which sparked lively and controversial debates. At the heart of the discussion was the question of whether political institutions are willing and able to treat the just energy transition as a structural issue and, if so, challenge dominant development models. Although no consensus was reached, the debate clearly highlighted the multitude of factors and details that must be considered when addressing the challenges of energy transitions.

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The third day of the conference opened with the second keynote address, *“Ubuntu Worldview in Response to Just Energy Transition: A Utopian Imaginary?”* by Dr. Aïda Terblanché-Greeff from North-West University in South Africa. This thought-provoking philosophical perspective drew on African Indigenous philosophies to challenge the Western-centric frameworks that dominate global just transition debates. Dr. Terblanché-Greeff emphasized the relational values of Ubuntu and

Ukama, which stress the interconnectedness of all people and beings, as well as the importance of sufficiency over accumulation. She argued that these Indigenous concepts offer a radically different vision for the energy transition, one that prioritizes mutual care, community solidarity, and environmental balance over individualistic, profit-driven models. Ubuntu, with its focus on humanity and interconnectedness, and Ukama, which highlights the relationships and reciprocal obligations that bind people to each other and the earth, present a framework for energy transitions that is both inclusive and sustainable. Dr. Terblanché-Greeff called for a pluriversal approach, advocating for the integration of these African Indigenous perspectives into global energy policy debates. By doing so, she challenged participants to rethink the energy transition as not only a technological and economic shift but as a profound transformation rooted in ethical principles of justice, care, and relationality. This keynote served as a powerful reminder that the global energy transition must be shaped by diverse worldviews, offering a more holistic and equitable path toward addressing both climate change and social inequality.

The roundtable discussion on *“The Power of Knowledge: Critical Perspectives on Knowledge Production,”* which took place on the third day of the conference, provided a space to critically examine the role of knowledge in shaping the energy transition. Moderated by Dr. Michaela Meurer from the University of Marburg, the discussion featured contributions from Carla Braga (University Eduardo Mondlane), Andreas Meurer (German Aerospace Center), and Ruy Llera Blanes (ISCTE-IUL), who brought diverse perspectives on how knowledge production intersects with energy policy and practice. The conversation focused on the power dynamics inherent in knowledge creation, questioning which forms of knowledge are valued in shaping energy strategies and whose perspectives are excluded. Participants discussed the need to challenge dominant, Western-centric models of knowledge and the importance of integrating local and indigenous knowledge systems into energy policy, particularly in the context of the Global South. The roundtable highlighted how knowledge is not neutral but embedded with power structures that influence decisions on energy transitions. It also explored the implications of these dynamics, advocating for more inclusive, pluralistic approaches to knowledge production that could lead to more equitable and sustainable energy futures.

The closing roundtable, *“A World Beyond Extractivism: Towards Globally Just Futures,”* brought together key insights from the previous sessions and offered a reflective look at the future of energy transitions. Featuring Dr. Esther Miedema from the University of Amsterdam, Damião Victor Namuera from Mozambique’s Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy, and Dr. Urânio Stefane Mahanjane, the discussion was moderated by Dr. Stefan Peters. The panel focused on envisioning

pathways toward sustainable energy systems that prioritize justice, inclusivity, and equity, particularly in resource-dependent regions. The speakers critically engaged with the challenges of moving beyond extractivism—acknowledging the complex legacies of resource extraction while exploring alternatives that support both environmental sustainability and social well-being. The roundtable also addressed how global energy transitions can be reimaged to ensure that the voices of marginalized communities are not only heard but actively shape the future of energy policy. A significant part of the discussion included the role of universities in driving this transformation, as institutions of higher learning are uniquely positioned to foster critical thinking, interdisciplinary research, and community engagement. Universities, as centers of knowledge production, have a crucial role in challenging extractivist paradigms and in shaping education and policy towards more equitable and sustainable energy futures. Ultimately, the session emphasized the importance of creating a more just and equitable energy system—one that does not perpetuate the exploitation of people or the planet, but instead builds sustainable futures for all.

The third day of our conference provided space for exploring a crucial third topic: the relevance of knowledge and knowledge production within the energy transition. This discussion emphasized the importance of considering how knowledge is generated and utilized, as it fundamentally shapes the pathways we take toward sustainable energy futures. Often, alternative pathways are excluded from the conversation, and their potential is ignored. Knowledge production is inherently tied to power dynamics—questions arose about which knowledge is prioritized when designing energy transition strategies, and whose voices are excluded or silenced in the process. We also examined the underlying ideas, assumptions, and even ontological foundations that shape current strategies for energy production and transition. The implications of these power-laden knowledge systems were critically addressed, highlighting the need to rethink and diversify the ways in which knowledge is produced and applied to ensure a more inclusive, equitable, and just energy transition.

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The final day of the conference featured an excursion to the Pedagogical University's Center for Research and Training in Renewable Energies and Sustainable Food Production (NEED). This visit provided participants with the opportunity to explore innovative, community-driven projects that integrate renewable energy solutions with sustainable agricultural practices. At the center, attendees were able to see firsthand how renewable energy can contribute to improving both food security and energy access, particularly in rural communities. The projects showcased how local

solutions can address pressing challenges related to energy and agriculture, offering concrete examples of sustainability in action.

The excursion was not only an educational experience but also a valuable networking opportunity. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions with local representatives, students from the Pedagogical University, and political stakeholders, fostering connections across sectors and countries. These interactions allowed for the exchange of ideas and experiences, deepening the understanding of the local context and the global challenges of the energy transition. The day was also a celebration of Mozambican culture, with participants enjoying delicious local delicacies made from vegetables grown on-site. This final day brought the conference to a close by combining learning, collaboration, and cultural exchange, leaving participants with lasting insights into how local initiatives can contribute to global sustainability goals.

Outcomes and results

The conference achieved its core objectives by deepening the understanding of how energy transitions uniquely affect resource exporting regions, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through fostering critical discussions on the unintended consequences of global sustainability initiatives, it underscored the importance of integrating diverse regional perspectives into the broader discourse on just energy transitions. Participants highlighted that the concept of a "just transition" remains underexplored in their national context, prompting essential discussions about how universities can position themselves as societal actors driving this agenda.

A key outcome of the conference was the recognition that context matters profoundly. In Mozambique, where half the population still lacks access to electricity, the challenges of an energy transition are distinct from those faced in wealthier nations in both the Global North and the Global South. Discussions enriched by the diverse disciplinary, regional, and professional backgrounds of the participants illuminated multi-faceted perspectives, emphasizing that equitable energy solutions in Sub Sahara Africa where energy poverty is prevailing must be context-sensitive and inclusive of those who have been historically marginalized.

Another significant insight was the contrast between regional perspectives from Africa and the predominantly global justice concerns shaped by Northern-centric frameworks. African viewpoints often emphasize immediate socioeconomic obstacles and local governance challenges over abstract global narratives, making

a compelling case for recalibrating international cooperation frameworks to better address the realities of resource-dependent regions.

By prioritizing regional realities and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, the conference succeeded in catalyzing meaningful connections among participants. These relationships promise to inform future research and policymaking efforts aimed at creating equitable and sustainable energy futures. Overall, the conference advanced critical discussions on achieving a truly just energy transition, emphasizing the necessity of balancing global ambitions with local needs and priorities.

How to move on...

As the conference concludes, we look ahead to the important work that remains in building upon the discussions and insights shared over these transformative days. The dialogue initiated here will continue to inspire future research, collaboration, and policy efforts aimed at achieving a just and inclusive energy transition. We are grateful to the organizing institutions, including the Pedagogical University of Maputo, the German Research Foundation (DFG), the University of Marburg, the University of Giessen, and all the supporting partners, whose dedication and effort made this encounter possible. We also extend our deepest thanks to the authorities at the Pedagogical University of Maputo for providing such a welcoming and collaborative environment, enabling meaningful exchanges throughout the conference. Finally, we offer our sincere appreciation to the participants—scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and students—who brought their expertise, passion, and commitment to the table. It is through these collective efforts that we can move forward, deepening our understanding and forging partnerships that will contribute to more equitable and sustainable futures.

Universities play a pivotal role in shaping a better future. They are not only centers of knowledge production but also spaces where critical thinking, innovation, and interdisciplinary approaches converge to address the complex challenges of our time. By fostering collaboration between academia, policy, and communities, universities can help design and implement solutions that prioritize justice, inclusivity, and sustainability. The connections made here will serve as the foundation for future initiatives, and we look forward to continuing the conversations sparked at this event. Through the active engagement of universities in research, education, and community-based initiatives, we can build a more equitable and sustainable future for all.