



Just Energy Transition Partnerships

Toward a Collective Assessment

One of the more recent phenomena to emerge on the international climate policy horizon, Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) promised to deliver quickly and effectively on just energy transitions in a select few developing countries. However, forged among a small group of partners outside the multilateral climate policy space, it is not yet clear how ambitious, just and inclusive they are. UNRISD convened a series of expert conversations and calls for an in-depth collective assessment to improve climate justice outcomes of JETPs.

JETPs as climate policy

At the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, UK (COP26), the first JETP between South Africa and an international partners group (IPG) (France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union) was announced. Since then, additional JETPs have been signed with Indonesia (2022), Viet Nam (2022) and Senegal (2023).

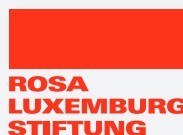
JETPs are often cited as an innovative feature of climate cooperation aimed at supporting and accelerating recipient countries' transition to cleaner energy sources. They also emphasize the need for a just transition. While not framed as an alternative to the UNFCCC, they have been developed based on the assumption that these "minilateral" efforts can deliver faster and more effectively than multilateral mechanisms.

But what does this new modality mean for justice, equity and participation? How can civil society, Indigenous and local communities, and academia assess what JETPs mean for eco-social and

JTRC engagement with JETPs

The Just Transition Research Collaborative (JTRC) was created by UNRISD as a space for exchange and discussion that brings together a range of experts from academia and civil society to collectively map and analyse the different understandings and narratives of just transitions. In 2023, it partnered with Public Services International, the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative and Climate Action Network International to convene a series of conversations that discussed JETPs with a diverse group of academics and practitioners and in the context of multilateral climate policy and broader quest for climate justice. The conversation series brought up a number of shared concerns and areas for improvement in JETP development and implementation. This policy brief was produced by UNRISD based on these discussions and highlights areas of convergence that can guide non-state actors' collective assessment of JETPs.

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climate justice? These and other questions have emerged in climate circles and deserve attention to ensure that both social and environmental justice are central to the development and implementation of JETPs.

Critically, civil society observers have noted that the process of developing and agreeing JETPs and their related Just Energy Transition Investment Plans (JET-IPs) are currently opaque. The ability of non-state actors to weigh-in on negotiations is limited by their lack of access to information which impedes the credibility of JETPs.

Moving toward a collective assessment

While the community of academics and civil society fighting for a just transition and climate justice is diverse and encompasses a wide array of positions and agendas, some elements of common concern are emerging regarding JETPs. This provides a foundation to develop a collective assessment of JETPs for greater transparency and improved climate justice outcomes.

Assessing JETPs collectively

Four steps are needed to guarantee a sufficient level of involvement of civil society and academia when assessing JETPs for more and better impact:

- Support national civil society organizations and academia through collection and synthesis of data
- Coordinate conversations connecting JETP countries with each other and with international just transition debates, including those proposing and implementing alternative approaches
- Go beyond case-by-case and anecdotal evidence to draw lessons learned, situate JETPs on the spectrum of just transition approaches (see JTRC 2018) and make recommendations across initiatives
- Apply this guiding framework to consolidate a people-driven approach to just energy transitions

A guiding framework for such a collective assessment of JETPs could scrutinize their three key themes:

1. Justice and inclusion in terms of participatory processes and outcomes,
2. Energy Transition, including the approach to energy markets promoted by JETPs through their financial arrangements and the extent to which JETPs are contributing to phasing out fossil fuels and diversifying the economy away from extractivism, and
3. Partnership, including aspects connected to ownership, governance and their impact on multilateral agreements.

1. Justice

While official JETP declarations make clear reference to justice and equity, the rationale for adding a justice element is framed around reducing citizens' opposition and resistance to advance decarbonization and ensure that no one is left behind. Long-term, this "managerial" approach may lead to minimal investment in the justice dimension as partnerships progress into implementation.

Academics and civil society practitioners showed a strong shared concern over the absence of real progress on the "just" part of the JETPs in terms of both process (severely limited civil society consultations) and outcome (lack of social justice objectives). As a result, two justice dimensions were identified as being critical when assessing JETPs: (i) the process created for designing and delivering on JETPs; and (ii) the social justice outcomes pursued by them.

Inclusive and equitable decision-making processes are paramount for enabling transitions that rectify and eliminate power asymmetries and overcome existing inequalities and injustices. They empower citizens and community organizations and can foster transformative processes leading to public

ownership and management of the new, decarbonized energy system. Beyond the moral imperative, equitably distributing the costs and benefits of decarbonization should be sought to accelerate low-carbon transitions by reducing opposition and contributing to achieving a range of other internationally agreed-upon development goals.

Guiding questions for assessment

Procedural justice

- How are civil society organizations and trade unions involved in JETP recipient and donor countries? Are there differences in the ways business representatives are involved?
- Have excluded and/or marginalized voices been brought into the conversation?
- What provisions exist for economic and social impacts at the local level?
- In what ways has tripartite social dialogue been applied for JETP development?
- Are there references to restorative, recognition and procedural justice?
- How has spatial justice been considered as a possible consequence of closures and risks with new investments (with the objective of avoiding new sacrifice zones)?

Distributive justice

- What resources are being allocated to supporting workers and communities? What is the share of those investments when compared to the rest?
- How do JET-IPs cover potential job losses?
- How are gendered and intersectional dimensions of energy poverty and access considered and addressed in investment plans?
- What resources are dedicated to supporting JETP recipient countries' economic diversification?
- How do JETPs connect with communities' expectation and understanding of justice?
- Are JETP funds used for compensating private actors?

2. Energy Transition

JETPs were initially described as an accelerator of the energy transition, often in narrow terms and primarily focused on the shift from coal-based electricity to renewable energy. This definition expanded in 2023 with the most recent JETP in Senegal which aims to gradually replace heavy fuel oils with gas and renewables. However, there remains a lack of clarity on how the decarbonization objective of JETPs is situated within the broader agenda for sustainable development and how it addresses tensions with other development goals such as energy access, fighting poverty or improving the balance-of-payments.

Currently, JETPs seem to favour renewable energy deployment based on the unbundling of electricity markets (separating generation, transmission and distribution) following the approach taken in Europe, for example, where states and public utilities make space for private sector actors. This limits renewable energy deployment to areas where profits can be made instead of prioritizing affordable access for the population and local economy. Indeed, the lack of transparency in JETP conditions is generating mistrust among civil society organizations who are increasingly seeing these partnerships as a new attempt to diminish the role of the public sector. Many questions remain on the rationale behind certain investments, for example, choosing electric vehicles over public transit options considering obvious differences in terms of beneficiaries and development pathways.

A just energy transition must go beyond shifting energy sources or changing the energy mix and clearly address questions related to ownership, power distribution and access rights as well as the imperatives of economic transformation and diversification. Furthermore, energy transition should not be used synonymously with decarbonization. Justice dimensions and interlinkages with other development goals such as universal and affordable energy access and overcoming

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inequalities are critically important for achieving climate justice.

Guiding questions for assessment	
Strategic level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the driving objective of JETPs (that is, energy access, security or transition, poverty alleviation)? • How is the energy transition plan seeking to displace fossil fuels from the energy mix? • Is there an outline of an alternative development strategy? What does this look like?
Implementation level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resources are being channelled versus what resources are needed? • Who is expected to access the newly generated energy and on what terms? • What resources are still going to fossil fuels? Are JETP resources used for advancing other extractive activities (that is, gas, hydrogen, transition minerals)? • How are regional cooperation and integration being considered? • What sectors are key for decarbonization? What relevant sectors are currently excluded from JETPs?
Conditionality and beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What approaches to electricity markets are being promoted? • Are JETPs used to promote a “de-risking” approach over a more direct use of public resources to organize the energy transition? • In what ways are access and affordability included as objectives of renewable energy development?

3. Partnership

JETPs, although formally announced in the context of the UNFCCC, are not a product of the multilateral negotiating process. This has led to a number of questions regarding governance, finance and overall equity in these partnerships. It is unclear how JETPs will impact the pursuit of a global just transition; what they mean for existing multilateral financial instruments such as the Green Climate Fund; and how they impact important discussions around obligations versus eligibility for climate finance.

A just (energy) transition must privilege bottom-up approaches and be delivered at both national and local levels. Participants highlighted the importance of embedding JETPs into national strategies and development plans rather than adjusting national strategies to fit JETPs. One of the most alarming issues regarding JETP governance is the absence of publicly accessible information. Information on the engagement of the IPG with recipient countries, disbursement of resources or signed agreements is currently not accessible. There is a shared perception that JETPs may also reproduce—and possibly worsen—the highly unequal partnership model found in traditional, bilateral aid relationships without acknowledging it.

One premise of JETPs is that they enable countries to access funding faster and easier than multilateral funds. At this stage, it is difficult to assess whether this is true since it is not yet clear how decisions are made and by whom nor how funder countries will transition from initial funding allocations to mobilizing the billions of dollars promised. While JETPs may present a new mode of finance delivery, general concern over funding sources and the use of conditional loans over grants are prevalent. This does not bode well for funding initiatives that provide no immediate return on investments but that are critical for public support and achieving eco-social justice in the transition. For example, the likelihood

of increased domestic public spending to compensate for the social impacts of coal transition and the implications this may have on debt levels and risks associated with loans-based finance requires more in-depth analysis.

Guiding questions for assessment

Funding arrangements

- In what ways are private sector funds being mobilized to match public funds?
- How is the risk of further indebtedness being captured?
- How are JETPs improving conditions for developing countries' access to foreign capital?

Governance

- What are the experiences of recipient countries when negotiating with the IPG compared to obtaining support through multilateral schemes?
- How do donor countries explain selection of JETP countries? What geopolitical reasons underpin their selection?
- What standards and accountability mechanisms are envisaged and needed for future JETPs?
- What is the role of global consulting firms in the build-up of JETPs?

Toward delivering on the J in JETPs

Pursuing a just transition enables us to confront the dual crises of climate change and inequality in a synergistic manner and creates possibilities for developing equitable alternatives to the current development model based on extractivism in the global South, mainly driven by overconsumption in the global North.

A just energy transition could transform the energy sector for the better: it offers opportunities to foster regional integration, develop more complex supply chains that

provide decent jobs for millions of people and to imagine pathways to prosperity within planetary boundaries. The extent to which JETPs respond to these expectations is still to be seen. Eco-social and climate justice are not guaranteed under an approach generally aimed at preserving the existing political economy (see JTRC 2018).

UNRISD's expert conversation series raised several concerns on the ways in which JETPs are currently unfolding. Unfortunately, information about JETPs is scattered and difficult to access, particularly for national civil society organizations and academics. This has so far prevented a thorough assessment and led participants to reflect on key aspects JETPs should contain. It also brought to the fore essential pieces of information that civil society stakeholders need to be able to access to evaluate their impact. Finally, it underlined that transparency is a prerequisite for socially owned and equitable solutions. JETP signatories must address the prevailing lack of information as a matter of urgency.

The emergence of JETPs since 2021 may indicate the beginning of a new wave of international agreements. Moving toward a common assessment may help create a collective standard on what JETPs can look like if they are to put justice at the centre and bring together the voices of different actors on the ground, including international organizations operating at the multilateral level. What is more, re-multilateralizing cooperation for a just (energy) transition is crucial. Avenues exist or are emerging through ongoing discussions by the Just Transition Work Programme under the UNFCCC which may help harmonize and hold accountable initiatives taken outside the multilateral arena, such as JETPs.

For ambitious endeavours like JETPs to be just, inclusive and effective, they should be grounded in robust criteria and safeguards formalized through the adoption of a just transition framework.

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Conversation series participants

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Reference

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