Climate Justice from Below
Local Struggles for Just Transition(s)

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A REPORT OF THE **JUST TRANSITION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE**

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Introduction

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION has become increasingly important with each IPCC report outlining more drastic environmental impacts and a shorter time frame to decarbonize and avert the most severe consequences of the looming climate crisis. While international climate policy and action has recently taken a wrong turn since losing the momentum that came with the adoption and early entry into force of the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016, cities are taking centre stage in the attempt to tackle climate change and signal their continued commitment to the Paris Agreement. Cities are both major contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and forerunners of sustainability. They account for around two thirds of the global energy demand and 75 percent of carbon emissions on the one hand (REN21 2019a). On the other, they are often drivers of the renewable energy transition and champions of sustainability innovation. Faced with rapid urbanization and mounting environmental and social pressures, cities have come up with a range of initiatives and ambitious plans to tackle climate change and transition to sustainability. Cities are often also hosts to progressive movements and alliances in the struggle for sustainability and climate justice. So will cities drive the just transition to low-carbon development?

While climate change impacts already threaten some of the most marginalized populations who have contributed least to climate change, mitigation policies can further disadvantage them, leading to a triple injustice (UNRISD 2016). In order to prevent such injustice, equity and justice considerations need to be part and parcel of climate policy. The Just Transition Research Collaborative published a state-of-the-art report on varieties of just transition that highlighted how different worldviews lead to different approaches to just transition that imply different notions of justice. Just transitions can aim for change at the margins that largely preserves the neoliberal or developmentalist status quo; or they can entail managerial reforms that aim to deal with crises, whether they take the form of popular protests and discontent, as in the case of the French "yellow vests" for example, or declining coal communities. Structural reforms, in turn, envisage greater procedural and distributive justice and can be a

precondition for more profound transformations in the way societies organize their economies, environments and social interactions (JTRC 2018).

Many of the more transformative examples of just transition have been rooted in local movements and community organizations exerting pressure on their local, regional and sometimes national governments to adopt alternative development strategies. Urban and local level transitions are not automatically progressive and just, however; rather, they fall along the same continuum of approaches to just transition mentioned above and differ correspondingly in their visions of a low-carbon and sustainable future. The extent to which cities can contribute to a transformative shift to low-carbon development, and how their potential can be utilized to accelerate a progressive just transition, needs careful assessment.

This report will therefore discuss urban and local level approaches and case studies of just transition, exploring the role of cities in implementing progressive and transformative just transition strategies and plans. Building on the theoretical framework and assessment produced in 2018 by the Just Transition Research Collaborative and published in *Mapping Just Transition(s) to a Low-Carbon World,* the objective of this report is to discuss local level examples and transition stories from different parts of the world and to kick-start a debate on the potential of local just transition policies and frameworks to influence higher level policy change and climate justice.

The report sheds light on a number of distinct aspects of the just transition debate that need further attention and discussion in order to craft just mitigation policies and spur rapid and fair climate action. It starts with an overview of policies that support urban transitions to a low-carbon economy, demonstrating potential inequality outcomes and the importance of inclusive decision-making processes. It goes on to show how the fallacy of opposing justice with the urgency of tackling the climate crisis can be used to exclude communities due to time and financial constraints or to push through "quick-fix" measures rather than find a more democratic solution that may challenge the status quo. Frontline communities whose lives intersect with fossil fuel industries are powerful agents in the struggle for a just transition as they face both environmental injustice from pollution and local impacts of heavy industries, and risk losing their employment in low-carbon transitions. Looking at the potential of transformative just transition

then offers an avenue to restructure power relations for systemic change and a more equitable society. It requires an approach beyond minimal community consultation and should be rooted in a human rights framework to ensure a transformative just transition.

The different case studies presented demonstrate the potential for just transition to address our most global environmental problem and localized social inequalities simultaneously, and warn about the risks if we do not. The examples from both developed and developing countries showcase the need for contextualized just transition measures that suit the needs of the affected communities in order to achieve greater political support and ambition in climate policy.

Finally, in our outlook, we suggest that just transition done right may pave the way for greater climate justice. If we can safeguard its original objective of reorganizing the political economy to protect both the environment and workers, just transition holds the potential to mobilize broad-based support in both developed and developing countries that is needed to demand a transformative shift towards sustainability and climate justice.

Which Policies Support Urban Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy and Reduce Inequalities[1]

THE RIOTING IN PARIS by the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) in 2018-2019 has drawn the world's attention to one of the potential pitfalls of climate policy—namely, what happens when policies that are designed and implemented to protect our planet are perceived to be "unfair". The Paris riots are by no means the first time this issue has been raised. In academic and policy discourse, the idea of "just transition" has been discussed for decades. In recent years, the concept of just transition has evolved, expanding from its rather narrow focus on industrial transition and workers' rights to include broader aspects of the low-carbon transition, including the various distributional impacts of climate policy. This shift in the understanding of what we mean by just transition has coincided with increasing interest in, and attention being paid to, the "equitability" of climate change and climate change mitigation policies in both developed and developing countries. As a result, an assumption that climate change mitigation policy, by default, benefits

those who are most vulnerable to climate change has been largely replaced by a more nuanced understanding that recognizes that those who are most vulnerable to climate change are also most vulnerable to bad policy (see, for example, Klinsky and Winkler 2018).

In the current context characterized by growing pressures on the global community and national governments to increase their ambition and actions on climate change, the need to better understand how, why and who may be negatively impacted by various types of climate change mitigation policies is more pressing than ever. Most climate change mitigation policies have the potential to generate positive as well as negative co-impacts, often referred to as co-benefits and adverse side-effects (Klinsky and Winkler 2018; Ürge-Vorsatz et al. 2014; von Stechow et al. 2015). The extent and direction of these co-impacts depends on contextual factors, policy design and implementation, and action that is taken to mitigate the potentially negative outcomes.

Understanding how mitigation policies may increase or decrease inequality will be essential to facilitate progress towards the Paris Agreement's targets without losing the support of the general public. The importance of considering the effects of climate change and climate change mitigation strategies on vulnerable populations– and the necessity of providing adequate support to negatively affected people and communities–was recognized in the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC 2015) and in the Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration at the Katowice Climate Change Conference (COP24), in December 2018.

Positive outcomes for economic equality emerge when policies reduce essential expenditure or improve opportunities for economic participation among poorer households, regions or countries (see Markkanen and Anger-Kraavi 2019 for a more detailed discussion). Negative outcomes for economic inequality, on the other hand, are associated with policies that have regressive distributional impacts, increase the cost of basic consumer goods (Ekins et al. 2011; Marcu and Vangenechten 2018; Sovacool 2017), reduce or remove employment opportunities (see IRENA 2016; ILO 2015) or limit people's access to natural resources (see Smith et al. 2014; Marino and Ribot 2012; Work 2017).

The close relationship between economic inequality and other forms of inequality means that gender, ethnic and health inequality outcomes surface as a result of policies that impact on economic inequality. This is highlighted especially in contexts where female-headed households and minority ethnic populations are over-represented in low-income groups.

The pathway to positive equality outcomes involves carefully considering who might be impacted by a given policy and involving these groups or communities in the decision-making process and policy implementation through processes such as community consultation (for

ensure equitable distribution of benefits at the local level via practices such as locating large-scale renewable energy projects in areas of high unemployment, training local unemployed people to fill the new jobs, and ensuring that the new employment opportunities do not exacerbate existing inequalities, such as gendered unemployment patterns.

A pro-poor approach involves explicit focus on how a policy could be used to benefit the poorest persons and taking active measures to address economic inequalities and mitigate regressive outcomes. For example, policy measures with potentially negative impacts on household income or livelihoods must be accompanied by sufficient mitigating measures, such as exemptions, subsidies, compensation for losses and concrete support to help affected individuals and communities to access alternative economic opportunities (Nhantumbo and Camargo 2015; Cernea 2008; Work 2017; Sills et al. 2014).

Case study: Urban transport policies

Policies that result in significant reductions in traffic volume, private car use and /or large-scale shift from internal combustion engine vehicles to electric ones improve air quality, especially in large cities that struggle with high levels of traffic-related air pollution (Wenwei et al. 2017; Parrish et al. 2011; WHO 2018; Buekers et al. 2014). The health benefits from improved air quality will accrue primarily to lower income households who are most likely to live in locations affected by poor air quality from road transport (Hajat et al. 2015; Pratt et al. 2015). As a result, such policies are likely to reduce health inequalities associated with economic inequality. In contexts where minority ethnic groups are over-represented among the residents in areas affected by high levels of traffic-related air pollution, policies that improve air quality in these areas will also reduce health inequalities between ethnic groups (for example Fecht et al. 2015; Jennings 2016).

Policies that aim to reduce private car use by improving