



## Just Transition(s) to Low-Carbon Development

A WORKSHOP OF THE JUST TRANSITION RESEARCH COLLABORATIVE

Effectively tackling climate change and setting the world on a sustainable, low-carbon and socially just development path is the greatest challenge the world is now facing. Just Transition—the idea that justice and equity must form an integral part of the transition toward a low-carbon world—has been gaining traction internationally as we collectively strive to address the important questions raised by this concept. But is Just Transition simply another buzzword, or should we take it seriously to advance international climate and sustainable development debates?

The Just Transition Research Collaborative brought together 20 expert collaborators for its inaugural workshop on 5–6 May 2018, in Bonn, Germany, to develop some possible responses to this question, and trace the history of the Just Transition concept and the different ways it is framed. Participants presented a number of case studies from both the global North and South illustrating the challenges and opportunities of implementing a Just Transition. The case studies presented at this workshop will also inform a more thorough analysis for a mapping report on Just Transition to be launched in December 2018.

### What do we mean by Just Transition?

The concept was first used in the 1970s in the United States by local labour unions to support industry workers who were being adversely affected by environmental protection policies. Since then, the Just Transition approach has evolved and spread to other geographies and constituencies, from environmental justice groups to the international trade union movement, to corporate interests and—particularly since its inclusion in the preamble of the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change—policy circles and national governments. But the growing number of references to Just Transition by a broad array of actors has brought with it new—and at times conflicting—understandings of its meaning. Beyond the general consensus on the need to factor equity and justice into policy discussions and decisions on low-carbon development, each stakeholder in the Just Transition debate has their own vision of how to achieve a Just Transition.

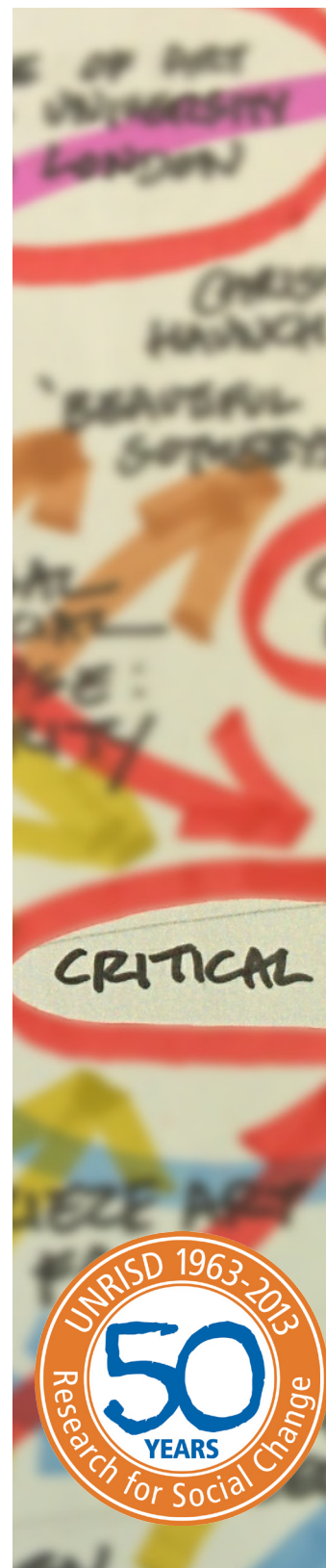
So while the Just Transition debate is unique in its ability to bring together a wide range of stakeholders around the equity and justice dimensions of climate change, it also raises a series of important questions: What kind of transition do we want? In the interests of whom? To what end? These are questions that inevitably necessitate a deeper discussion of the meaning of justice in the age of climate change.

#### Why Just Transition(s)?

- To inform policy debates on implementing equitable transitions to low-carbon development
- To understand social implications of low-carbon transitions in different contexts and beyond fossil fuel sectors
- To showcase how Just Transition can accelerate urgently needed implementation of climate policies

### Adopting a holistic approach to Just Transition

Instead of leading to an alignment of stakeholders' views, the Just Transition concept's growing popularity has led to an expansion of its meaning. For some, focusing on the justice and equity dimensions of the shift to a low-carbon world can inform a new, powerful and transformative narrative—a narrative of hope, tolerance and justice. Grassroots organizations, such as Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Cooperation Jackson and the Climate Justice Alliance, adopt a transformative lens seeking to redress multiple injustices by factoring in a wide range of interconnected issues: racial,



gender and class inequalities, energy poverty, and the privatization of key services. This approach differs significantly from those of more moderate groups that tend to adopt a narrower, jobs-focused approach to Just Transition.

### 🕒 A closer look at selected case studies

The different case studies presented at the workshop highlighted the need to adopt a broad approach to Just Transition to avoid reproducing and reinforcing existing inequalities and injustices.

#### ● Canada

The example of Canada's coal phase-out illustrated that to achieve effective and equitable transitions, countries must move beyond a narrow focus on the emissions-heavy energy industry and address multiple economic sectors. Supporting only the mostly male fossil fuel workforce in their transition to new sectors would have neglected the predominantly female service workers whose livelihoods are also affected by the closure of coal mines and who already work in much lower paid and more precarious situations (Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood).

#### ● Brazil

The case of Brazil brought up one of the key challenges of transitioning to low-carbon development—ensuring the creation of jobs that are green *and* decent (that is productive work, in conditions of freedom, equality,

security and human dignity). Workers in the renewable energy sector in Brazil are much less unionized than is the case in the fossil fuel workforce (Diego Azzi).

#### ● South Africa

The case of South Africa highlighted the issue that where unemployment rates are extremely high, workers' acceptance and support of renewable energy transitions decreases. Another key point in this case is that trade unions in South Africa are voicing their opposition to privatized renewable energy expansion and calling for a socially owned renewable energy sector (Sandra van Niekerk).

Overall, the workshop showed how the meanings associated with the Just Transition concept have evolved over time and across geographies to become less worker-centered and more comprehensive, often including issues such as energy security, energy poverty, and gender, racial and climate justice. If Just Transition is to contribute to greater equity and justice, it needs to challenge the inbuilt inequalities that exist between different social groups and move beyond a green growth or business-as-usual agenda. This involves calling power relations into question and taking intersectional issues, such as human rights, gender and the participation of indigenous and local communities into consideration, which are all central to an equitable transition to low-carbon development.

#### Just Transition Research Collaborative and Online Forum

The Just Transition Research Collaborative (JTRC) is 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 aspects of the Just Transition underpinning the concept's growing popularity and uptake.

In an online forum ([medium.com/just-transitions](https://medium.com/just-transitions)), the JTRC showcases a combination of concrete case studies and more conceptual analyses on narratives and approaches to the Just Transition and their implications for equity and social justice. The forum is a shared space for academics and other interested parties to share their views (and voice their concerns) on the Just Transition, its meanings, its current uses and its potential.

#### Further Information

The workshop was organized jointly by UNRISD, the University of London Institute in Paris and the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. The project is funded by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung with support from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

More information on the project is available at [www.unrisd.org/jtrc](http://www.unrisd.org/jtrc)



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This workshop of the Just Transition Research Collaborative was co-organized by UNRISD, ULIP AND RLS. This brief was prepared by Dunja Krause with assistance from Joachim Roth and Meredith Lee Brown.

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