

Unlocking the potential of the Just Transition Work Programme to enable ambitious climate action

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The Paris Agreement, under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), stipulates that fairness and equity must be recognized as central and actionable elements of its implementation. Establishing institutional arrangements to embed these principles is essential to turn ambition into practice. Guiding the application of these principles to achieve global climate goals should be a core function of the UNFCCC process, and should not be delegated to other institutions. The vision of a fair, inclusive, and prosperous future for all forms one of the foundational pillars of the Paris Agreement, and yet it remains the most underdeveloped (Torres Gunfaus *et al.*, 2025).

The Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) is key to addressing this gap. The Brazilian presidency has identified the JTWP as one of its key priorities, along with the need to align the multilateral process with people's lived realities. Building on concrete results from this negotiated track, COP30 can build a foundation to facilitate the delivery of just transitions to catalyse action within countries. A strong outcome would also set the basis for the 2026 review of the Work Programme, ensuring its future evolution strengthens implementation.

To unlock the potential of the JTWP programme, COP30 must agree on the institutional arrangements that will guide and support just transitions within the process going forward. This will also position equity and fairness as key principles to address current gaps in collective ambition and action.

KEY MESSAGES

Just transitions are not optional supplements to climate policy; they are the foundation for sustained and ambitious domestic and international cooperative action. They necessitate whole-of-economy, whole-of-society approaches and international cooperation.

The JTWP, created at COP27, has the potential to play multiple complementary roles to ensure that the Paris Agreement is implemented to reflect equity. This requires new functions, and supportive institutional arrangements that exceed current modalities, which are limited to dialogues and roundtables.

The JTWP should work on identifying which functions are needed to make equity and fairness actionable principles that can guide implementation within and beyond the UNFCCC, across policy areas, systems, and geographies. This may include providing guidance, facilitation, technical support, and institutional anchoring.

Equity and fairness principles should also inform how COP30 responds to the ambition gap from current NDCs. This involves recognizing differentiated national circumstances and capabilities to close the global shortfall in short-term emissions reductions and adapting to impacts in line with CBDR-RC. It also means positioning just transitions as important ways to accelerate action and foster societal support, ensuring countries can exceed their current ambitions.

1. JUST TRANSITIONS AS A CHART FOR AMBITIOUS CLIMATE ACTION

Just transitions¹ are not optional add-ons to climate policy; they are the foundation of sustained and ambitious climate action. Without them, current transition efforts are unfolding unevenly and far too slowly, resulting in worryingly meagre progress being made towards international climate goals as defined in the Paris Agreement.

Transitions to net-zero emission and climate-resilient economies and societies are not merely techno-economic puzzles hinging on the substitution of one technology for another. Transition pathways are driven and shaped by complex political, economic and social dynamics that are embedded within ecological systems. The transformative nature of these transitions results in far-reaching effects that span multilevel governance systems, all industries and economic sectors, labour markets and social systems.

However, transition impacts do not affect all countries, economies or populations equally. They interact with climate change, entrenching multiple dimensions of inequality within and between countries. This results in the inequities in the distribution of risks, costs, opportunities and benefits, both now and in the future. Many countries and communities are already being 'left behind' and are therefore disempowered in ways that can slow mitigation, weaken adaptive capacity, increase vulnerability, and restrict fair access to emerging opportunities.

The evolving just transition policy agenda is a response to the above context and challenge. Countries across the world are faced with the responsibility of managing potential trade-offs between climate action and social development and provide channels to learn from granular experience, including capitalizing on experiences of other transitions. Managing transition impacts fairly requires acknowledging that just transitions are not only about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to impacts but also about doing so in ways that address the inequalities holding communities and countries back.

As just transitions have grown in prominence in both international and national climate governance, the limitations of existing approaches have been clarified. This has prompted a shift toward a broader, more transformative understanding that reflects the systemic change called for in the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) (IPCC, 2023)². Although still being refined, this expanded framing recognises that achieving climate goals requires whole-of-economy and whole-of-society approaches

that link climate action to sustainable development policy goals, such as poverty reduction. Because of its broad scope of analysis and action, whole-of-economy, whole-of-society approaches to just transitions can and must be sensitive to inequality both within and between countries. In sharp contradistinction, country-level analyses show limited convergence between socioeconomic and climate considerations in national planning efforts (DDP, 2025)³.

Whole-of-economy, whole-of-society approaches acknowledge that all sectors of the economy are interconnected, supported by coherent international governance and recognise that climate considerations can go beyond the mainstream to drive economic policy and access and realise opportunities. It allows for a more comprehensive assessment of how the risks, costs, opportunities, and benefits of transitioning are distributed. It also provides a rationale for redistribution to support fair and inclusive outcomes.

Global and national efforts must align so that domestic transitions respond to local needs while contributing to shared climate and sustainable development goals.⁴ The global and interconnected nature of just transitions makes international coordination and orchestration functions reaching out to regimes beyond UNFCCC essential.⁵ Economic, social, and ecological systems are richly interconnected across borders. Unequal, unjust or arrested transitions in one region can have far-reaching effects on global stability, through, for example, disrupted trade, increased migration, or financial volatility.⁶

2. UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT ROLE AND FORM OF THE JTWP

The current mandate and modalities

As a mandate that stems directly from the Paris Agreement, the pursuit of fairness and equity must be recognized as central and actionable elements of its implementation. Guiding the application of these principles to the achievement of global climate goals cannot be delegated to other institutions. The Paris Agreement falls under the auspices of the UNFCCC, through which Parties must realise the objectives articulated in Article 2.

To ensure that the goals of the Paris Agreement are achieved equitably,⁷ the United Arab Emirates Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) was initiated at COP27. Its aim

¹ Many different definitions of "Just Transitions" exist, and their scope has broadened in the last years. For a reflection on different approaches, see: <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/note/reflections-global-enablers-just-transitions-net-zero-emissions>

² IPCC (2023). *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team: H. Lee & J. Romero (Eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 184 pp. <https://doi.org/10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647>

³ DDP (2025). *DDP Annual Report 2025*. Paris: Deep Decarbonization Pathways Initiative

⁴ This includes but is not limited to the formally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

⁵ <https://www.iddri.org/en/publications-and-events/note/reflections-global-enablers-just-transitions-net-zero-emissions>

⁶ <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/202504282329-sei-unfccc-submission-jtwp.pdf>

⁷ Decision 1/CMA.4. Para 52. Decides to establish a work programme on just transition for discussion of pathways to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement outlined in Article 2, paragraph 1, in the context of Article 2, paragraph 2.

is to provide a forum for developing a shared framework for international cooperation for just transitions to net zero at domestic and international levels, facilitating options to navigate growing political polarization around the fairness of the transition within and between current and future generations, as well as between developed and developing countries (Wang & Robins, 2024)⁸.

The JTWP's modalities are currently limited to dialogues and ministerial roundtables. To date, there have been four dialogues and two high-level roundtables, which have effectively generated key messages now under negotiation for possible inclusion in the COP30 decision.

BOX 1. JTWP DIALOGUES UNDER THE CURRENT MODALITIES

DIALOGUES

June 2024: "Just Transition pathways to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement through NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDs"

October 2024: "Ensuring support for people-centric and equitable just transition pathways with a focus on the whole-of-society approach and the workforce"

May 2025: "Approaches to enhancing adaptation and climate resilience in the context of just transitions"

September 2025: "Just energy transition pathways and holistic approaches to just transitions including socio-economic, workforce, social protection and other dimensions, based on nationally defined development priorities"

HIGH-LEVEL MINISTERIAL ROUNDTABLES

COP28 in Dubai

COP29 in Baku

Challenges related to current modalities

While dialogues and roundtables provide a valuable platform for discussion, their outputs can sometimes be inconsistent in terms of coherence, blending well-founded insights with perspectives that may lack sufficient substantiation or reflect particular political viewpoints.

Structural UNFCCC challenges, including the process for selecting dialogue topics, language barriers, and unequal participation, undermine the inclusivity and balance of the issues, concerns and interests reflected in the dialogues and roundtables. The synthesis reports⁹ that compile dialogue outcomes serve as the main mechanism for translating fairness into transition discussions. However, the absence of consistent analytical

frameworks limits their ability to offer clear guidance, sometimes reflecting existing perspectives rather than challenging or reframing them.

The lack of agreement at COP29 highlighted the challenges of the dialogues. Co-facilitators were tasked with making incongruent positions cohere, leading to outcomes perceived by some as fragmented and contested. Without undermining the complexity of multilateral talks, greater coherence could be achieved by grounding deliberations in evidence, reflecting a balanced range of perspectives from the outset, and offering clear, actionable guidance to the negotiators.

3. THE POTENTIAL OF THE JTWP

The need for new modalities and institutional arrangements

As the Paris Agreement reaches its 10th anniversary, the vision of a fair, inclusive, and prosperous future for all remains the most underdeveloped of the Agreement's foundational pillars (Torres Gunfaus *et al.*, 2025)¹⁰. This weakens the capacity of the Agreement to ensure universal engagement and to drive the transformative action required to meet the Agreement's goal, including deep reconfigurations of supply chains and inclusive growth in new and emerging markets.

The JTWP is key in addressing this failure. It has the potential to play several additional roles in advancing just transitions across domestic and international spheres of governance and implementation, as outlined in a previous submission to the JTWP by the authors of this *Brief*.¹¹ Among Parties and observers, several have observed that current modalities are insufficient. At present, the key messages¹² emerging from the JTWP dialogues offer a starting point but would need further development to effectively guide, facilitate, and eventually orchestrate just transitions.

This calls for a rethinking and evolution of the current modalities towards new institutional arrangements. These arrangements should provide practical guidance, support, and coordination, enabling achievable wins and actionable outcomes while respecting resource constraints and existing UNFCCC structures.

Prior to defining the institutional form, attention should be given to the functions to be performed and the features or modalities that would enable these functions to be carried out effectively. (Table 1).

⁸ Wang, J., & Robins, N. (2024). *Submission to the United Arab Emirates Just Transition Work Programme topics for the dialogues*. London: Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science

⁹ Informal summary of dialogue 1: <https://unfccc.int/documents/640155>, dialogue 2: <https://unfccc.int/documents/642594>, dialogue 3: <https://unfccc.int/documents/65043>

¹⁰ Torres Gunfaus, M., Deprez, A., Kauffmann, C. *et al.* (2025). *Paris+10 Diagnosis: Looking back to look forward*. IDDRI, Working Paper No. 01/25.

¹¹ https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202502211104---IDDRI_ST_SEI_UCT%20submission%20to%20the%20JTWP.pdf

¹² Informal note agreed at SB62: <https://unfccc.int/documents/648554>

TABLE 1. Potential functions and features of the JTWP

FUNCTIONS	EXAMPLES	FEATURES
Guidance: guide the integration of principles of equity and fairness in the implementation of climate action within and outside of the UNFCCC, across domestic and global scales, including sending signals as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Explore and articulate diverse definitions and interpretations of just transitions to broaden shared understanding and enhance relevance across contexts. — Provide structured process steps and guiding frameworks to support practical action. This includes facilitating linkages across sectors and stakeholders—helping identify opportunity levers, mitigate risk drivers, align incentives, and deliver tangible, near-term outcomes. — Curate and contextualise tools and resources to enable their effective use. Resources should be presented in alignment with a "whole-of-economy and whole-of-society" approach to just transitions—emphasizing fair access to transition opportunities, equitable decarbonization, and inclusive adaptation and resilience. This also includes identifying gaps and informing targeted calls for additional evidence, tools, and support. — Generate and facilitate access to robust evidence that empowers actors—both directly and indirectly involved in just transitions. 	Guidance should be non-prescriptive, voluntary, complementary of existing work, and supportive rather than restrictive.
Coordination: minimise overlap and misalignment, and maximise coherence and synergies within and outside of the UNFCCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Provide guidance to relevant parts of the UNFCCC, on how to integrate and operationalise just transitions — Send signals to the international cooperation ecosystem (international finance, trade, and others) on how to integrate fairness and equity into their climate and related actions, as appropriate. 	Coordination should be complementary while recognizing the need to establish appropriate governance structures to ensure integration within and outside of the UNFCCC
Knowledge management: facilitate appropriate and accessible knowledge generation and application to support the integration of fairness and equity into relevant policies and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Knowledge generation, learning, consolidation and sharing (repository). — Develop and create access to knowledge on just transition pathways, tools, and best practices by curating available resources and informing additional resources needed. 	Knowledge management should not duplicate efforts but rather consolidate and leverage existing guidance frameworks, tools and information, and identify and contribute to filling gaps through calls for additional resources.
Partnerships and matchmaking: facilitating engagement oriented toward concrete deals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Bring actors together for high-level, in-depth discussions about key topics of interest — Create opportunities for countries to come together to share methodologies, tools, best practices, challenges and gaps, to enable cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder learning and support. — Make just transition projects and programmes fundable and findable — Facilitate access to finance, technology, capacity building and other support — Support partnerships and facilitate concrete deals. 	The UNFCCC should play the role of a neutral facilitator
Technical support: address technical capacity and capability challenges limiting the operationalization of just transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Facilitate access to technical assistance and advisory services from regional and international organizations, bodies, networks, building on and coordinating with existing capacity-building bodies (e.g., Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB), Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG)) and experts on just transition planning and implementation. This could take the form of a "shared services" model, making a centralized technical resource base accessible to multiple Parties and implementation actors. — Facilitate technical matchmaking to connect countries with needs (e.g. coal transition plans) to relevant expertise, finance, and peer experience. — Coordinate capacity-building initiatives tailored to the needs of governments, workers' organizations, local communities, and other relevant stakeholders. — Serve as a platform for good practices, toolkits, methodologies, and case studies on just transition strategies, social dialogue, workforce transition planning, and policy coherence. — Monitor and assess gaps in just transitions support and recommend ways to address them in the broader UNFCCC and financial architecture. 	Technical support needs to remain optional, demand-driven and, to the extent possible, impartial and independent.

* Also developed in <https://t20southafrica.org/publications/from-principles-to-action/> and <https://plataformacipo.org/en/publications/from-the-g20-to-the-unfccc-pathways-to-just-and-inclusive-transitions-volume-1-n-3-2025/>

Based on the functions described above, some concrete actionable conclusions emerge:

- **Institutional arrangements should be facilitative, enabling the integration of fairness and equity within, and beyond, the UNFCCC:** Just transitions are a cross-cutting issue and must not be siloed as a standalone component. Just transitions is a concept that should be understood by actors beyond UNFCCC.

- **Creating new bodies risks adding complexity, delaying outcomes, and straining resources, but some process is needed:** Simply mandating equity integration elsewhere, without support and guidance, will not drive effective just transitions at the scale or speed needed to meet the Paris goals.
- **A process is needed to define functions and future institutional arrangements:** Functions could be built into

existing institutional arrangements (for example, as standing agenda items) or beyond. Clear mandates would also be needed to report on how just transition has been integrated into the work of an existing institutional body within the UNFCCC. However, such an approach needs to recognise that taking into account the principles of equity and fairness in climate action is challenging and may require support and guidance if policies and measures are to be effective.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COP30

COP30 can turn the JTWP into a driver of climate action

Based on the analysis above, in the context of the JTWP, COP30 should deliver two clear outcomes, as below:

- **1) Alignment of Parties' positions on the potential functions and future modalities of the JTWP:** discussions at COP30 should focus on identifying the key JTWP functions needed to make the integration of equity and fairness principles in climate action feasible. This may include guidance, facilitation, technical support, and institutional anchoring. The respective roles of the JTWP and other institutional arrangements must be clarified. These conversations must remain grounded in practical realities, given limited resources, an already crowded institutional landscape, and underused arrangements under the Paris Agreement (Torres Gunfaus *et al.*, 2025)¹³.
- **2) A framework for a strong JTWP review process:** the mandate of the JTWP is expiring in 2026. Therefore, a robust 2026 review is essential to assess the JTWP's effectiveness and guide its evolution. Currently, the review's scope, process, and outputs remain ambiguous. COP30 should clarify that the review will begin in early 2026, aligned with the Fifth and Sixth JTWP Dialogues, and include dedicated SB space for inputs from Parties and non-Party stakeholders. Its scope should evaluate the effectiveness of dialogues, institutional arrangements, and equity integration across UNFCCC processes. To effectively inform COP31 decisions, review outputs must be actionable and provide concrete

and targeted recommendations. In addition, establishing a clear and well-scoped review process will enhance the JTWP's credibility. This is key in ensuring that it contributes to tangible advancements towards fair and ambitious climate action.

How COP30 can position just transitions as a response to the ambition and implementation gaps

The COP30 Presidency has identified the JTWP as one of its key priorities, resonant with the need to align the multilateral process with people's lived realities. The opportunity exists to ensure that equity and fairness are made central to climate negotiations. This is part of a necessary political response to the growing climate action implementation gap, reflected in turn, in the set of new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). In concrete terms, this would entail:

- **Recognizing differentiated capacities to close the global shortfall in near-term emissions reductions and adapting to impacts, in line with CBDR-RC:**
 - From a scientific perspective, meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement requires substantial absolute emission reductions within this decade.
 - Differentiating between levels of capacity accounts for the distinct circumstances and potential of certain countries to take short- and medium-term actions to shift the current global trajectory.
 - Structured processes reflecting country-level challenges and opportunities can inform further action and collaboration.
- **Positioning international collaboration for just transitions as a catalyst to accelerate action and build societal support:**
 - Just transitions can build societal support to enhance current levels of ambition reflected in NDCs.
 - Addressing implementation necessitates a focus on delivering just transitions as well as the required enabling conditions.
 - Applying equity and fairness principles also calls for a commitment to collaboration to anticipate, identify, and appropriately manage the socio-economic impacts of individual or collective climate action on any individual or groups of Parties, regions, communities or businesses.

¹³ Torres Gunfaus, M., Deprez, A., Kauffmann, C. *et al.* (2025). Paris+10 Diagnosis: Looking back to look forward. IDDRI, *Working Paper* No. 01/25.

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