

COP 26: A just transition?

Workshop summary

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SUMMARY

This briefing summarises the findings of two workshops held at a fringe event in Glasgow City Council Chambers at COP26. The workshops involved hearing from nine speakers detailing international case studies where projects or governments implemented a just transition in their nation or community. Five of the case studies are focused on national just transition examples from around the world and four are focused on community examples of just transition around the world that emphasise community engagement and participation.

In this briefing, we draw out the common themes emerging from these case studies to provide learnings for stakeholders interested in their own projects focussed on embedding a just transition. From the first workshop, common findings included:

- the importance of coordinated government approaches between national, regional, and local levels of government
- the need to go beyond protecting jobs to maximising the wider benefits of a transition and engaging with the local community
- the importance of having a clear industrial strategy that diversifies the economy away from the industry in question
- the recognition that transitions take time but the time to act is running out as the climate crisis intensifies
- the recognition that awareness of a just transition can vary, and a nation's economic circumstances will impact their ability to deliver one.

From the second workshop, common findings included:

- wider community engagement is essential to getting buy-in from people
- part of the success and positive attitude towards community-focussed projects has been sharing (in some cases literally) the fruits of their labour with the community itself
- while business models can vary, funding, even if just at the start, is normally crucial to community projects in some form to get them going
- while engaging with the community can help to create buy-in, it is also important to recognise that some people may be resistant to the project's goals.

This briefing concludes by discussing how the common findings highlight the need for greater collaboration in three domains. First, within countries, it will be key for national, regional, and local government to be coordinated in order to develop both large-scale just transition projects and local, community-led projects all within a national framework. Second, for the UK and Germany in particular, the similarities in economic circumstances offers an opportunity for greater knowledge sharing. Finally, these case studies demonstrate how the theory and practice of just transitions vary between nations and depending on

economic circumstances, suggesting a greater need for global knowledge sharing in future COP negotiations.

JUST TRANSITION AND COP26

A global just transition is an integral part of international efforts to limit global heating to 1.5C. In its original form a just transition is defined as “*securing the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is based on social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers, and government, and consultation with communities and civil society*”.¹ Since its introduction, the term has evolved to incorporate ensuring that the benefits and costs of the transition to a low-carbon economy are fairly shared within, and crucially between, countries. This broader definition has frequently been used and was referenced in IPPR’s Environmental Justice Commission where it called for a ‘fairness lock’.

The importance of a just transition was a key part of COP 26 negotiations and resulted in a commitment from several developed economies to support the conditions for a just transition in the first week of negotiations.² This not only included commitments to support domestic workers but also involved committing to supporting developing economies to move away from fossil fuels and came just days after a multilateral commitment between the UK, USA, France, Germany, the EU and South Africa to spend \$8.5 billion to support South Africa to move away from coal.³ Finally, in the COP26 decision ratified by all parties included clear language that supported just transitions, specifically “*emphasi[sing] the important role of indigenous people’ and local communities’ culture and knowledge in effective action on climate change and urg[ing] Parties to actively involve indigenous peoples and local communities in designing and implementing climate action*”.⁴

On the other hand, the COP26 negotiations were heavily criticised by many activists for excluding civil society and indigenous voices from the Global South from observing negotiations.⁵ Within the negotiations themselves, perhaps one of the defining images of the negotiations was the COP26 president, Alok Sharma, apologising to climate-vulnerable nations for last-minute watering down of commitments to phase out fossil fuels (changed to ‘phase-down’). Yet this modification was proposed by India,⁶ a signatory to the Silesia Declaration committing to a just transition at COP24 and perhaps best exemplifies how the language and principles of a just transition may not be fully embedded within policy in all countries and indeed can mean different things in different nations.

¹ <https://www.ituc-csi.org/just-transition-centre#:~:text=Just%20Transition%20Centre,-Welcome%20to%20the&text=A%20Just%20Transition%20secures%20the,with%20communities%20and%20civil%20society>

² <https://ukcop26.org/supporting-the-conditions-for-a-just-transition-internationally/>

³ <https://ukcop26.org/political-declaration-on-the-just-energy-transition-in-south-africa/>

⁴ <https://study.soas.ac.uk/cop26-just-transition-glasgow/>

⁵ <https://www.scidev.net/global/news/global-south-observers-blocked-from-cop26-negotiations/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/13/cop26-countries-agree-to-accept-imperfect-climate-agreement>

IPPR WORKSHOPS

To seek to understand this challenge further, IPPR, in partnership with FES, Local Trust and Agulhas, held two workshops at COP26 focused on just transition case studies from both developed and developing countries to understand what commonalities and differences could be understood from these examples.

The first workshop discussed just transition examples from around the world, including in countries most vulnerable to climate change impacts, particularly in the global south. Speakers shared examples of success whilst championing a diverse range of voices from trade unions, civil society, businesses, and government. The speakers in this session were Professor Kwabena Anaman, professor of economics, University of Ghana; Dr Hanna Brauers, research associate, TU Berlin; Tari Lestari, associate researcher, Dala Institute for Environment and Society, Indonesia; Nithi Nesadurai, president, Environmental Protection Society Malaysia and regional coordinator of Climate Action Network Southeast Asia; and Jan Philipp Rohde, unionist, DGB, German Trade Union Confederation.

The second workshop focussed on public engagement and involvement in combatting the climate crisis in a fair way, including the role of community climate action domestically and globally. This workshop showcased community groups from the UK and globally, who are acting on climate and nature in their own local area. The speakers in this session were Ian Thomas, director, Welcome to Our Woods, Wales; Aviram Rozin, project leader, Sadhana Forest Kenya; Emma Fletcher, chair, Swaffham Prior Community Land Trust; and Ena K McPherson, founder and lead gardener, Urban Community Gardens in Brooklyn.

In the following sections, we outline the common themes of these workshop sessions, as well as the key differences. We then set out some next steps for a just transition as part of the future COP process. Below, we also provide a short summary of each of the contributions to the events.

KEY LESSONS

Session 1: Just transitions examples around the world

Coordinated government approaches

Coordination at all levels of government was a consistent theme for many just transition examples. In Ghana, this has been apparent through the adoption of just transition language (or at least principles) across multiple government departments and among trade unions too. In Germany, the transition away from hard coal was administered using a multi-level governance and planning approach at federal, regional, and municipal level.

In Indonesia, the national government has committed both to phase out coal for electricity by 2056 and to the Silesia Declaration which commits to ensuring workers are not left behind in the transition to net zero economies. Though the concept of a just transition is still relatively new to many stakeholders, the national commitment is being matched by local pilots in the coal regions of East Kalimantan and South Sumatra which will work with workers and communities to ensure no one is left behind in the transition away from coal.

Going beyond jobs to stress benefits and engage with the wider community

In each example of just transition discussed, whether the transition had already taken place, or a transition was needed in future, there was a common emphasis among speakers on the need to go beyond the so-called 'tripartite' model of dialogue, namely plans that include the voices of employers, employees and government. While protecting jobs was a core part of many of the just transition examples, it was also seen as crucial to look at the wider economic benefits and involve members of the communities, local businesses and disadvantaged and minority populations where these transitions are taking place. This has previously been echoed by IPPR's Environmental Justice Commission which sets out how a fair transition must focus on the opportunity to maximise wellbeing as much as minimise potentially negative impacts.⁷

These stakeholders are crucial to the process. Successes from transitions in Germany involved consultation with business leaders and stakeholders beyond the directly affected industries in the region, centred on plans to grow the local economy. Speakers from Indonesia noted that this will also need to be a key feature of just transition dialogue in East Kalimantan and Sumatra because of the importance of coal to the local economic activity of the communities living there.

Lastly, in Ghana, while protecting and creating jobs has been a key feature of just transition planning, our speaker suggested that the just transition agenda was also being taken forward because of the wider economic benefit to people's livelihoods in communities that may be affected.

⁷ <https://www.ippr.org/research/publications/fairness-and-opportunity>

The importance of economic diversification and industrial strategy

A key feature of Germany's two coal transitions – from hard coal and more recently from lignite – was the importance of economic diversification and a clear industrial strategy to any transition plan in the region. This was also echoed by speakers from other nations.

This was seen as a crucial component of a just transition in Germany and involved the government investing public money in the region in order to leverage business investment, create new jobs and growth within coal regions. The result was to widen the range of opportunities for workers and indeed the wider community affected by coal phase outs.

Transitions take time but time is running out

A consistent theme was that any truly just transition takes time but as the climate crisis intensifies, time is running out to enact them. The transition away from hard coal in Germany took place over several decades and the lignite phase out will continue until 2038. A key part of the transition is developing new industries and new economic growth in the regions affected but this will take place over years and decades, not weeks and months.

Similarly in Indonesia, the government's commitment to reach net zero by 2060 and phase out coal in electricity by 2056 indicates a lengthy time period for the transition. As the urgency of staying within 1.5C of global heating increases, given the long-time scales associated with these transitions it will be critical to start them as soon as possible.

Awareness of just transition can vary

While all speakers agreed a just transition was crucial, the term and some of the principles themselves are less familiar in some countries. For example, while just transition has been embedded within policymaking in the examples in Germany and Ghana, the idea of a just transition was poorly understood in many countries within the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) network. While organisations like the Climate Action Network in South East Asia recently briefed ASEAN climate negotiators on the term, there is still relatively little policy focused explicitly on a just transition in ASEAN nations.

Economic circumstance plays a big role in the ability to deliver a just transition

The structure of the economy in the examples given affects their capacity to deliver a just transition effectively. For example, a key facet of just transition examples in Germany was a robust social security system. In Indonesia by contrast, it was noted that 60 per cent of workers work in the informal economy without state protections and that the social security system is much more limited.

Furthermore, countries like Indonesia are much more dependent on exports of fossil fuels like coal. Consequently, climate-driven reductions in coal from countries to which Indonesia exports could be disruptive to the Indonesian

economy if their phase out does not keep pace with other countries. This hits at the heart of one of the major challenges of international fairness – namely that developed countries’ attempts to undergo their own just transitions risk creating unjust transitions in more developing countries.

Session 2: Community-led examples of just transition

Importance of wider community buy-in

In every community-led example, as IPPR has previously found through conducting its own Citizens’ Juries across the UK,⁸ engagement with the community from the project leaders was essential to generating enthusiasm and buy-in. For the Welcome to our Woods project, a key moment for engagement with the community came from taking over an old library on the high street and converting it into a community space. This space became a focal point for the project’s activities and enabled them to raise awareness of activities happening in the more remote forests as well as host community events such as courses and community feasts using produce from their own gardens.

For Sadhana Forest, volunteers would work and live with local indigenous communities and ensure that the vision for tree-planting was shaped by the communities themselves. In Brooklyn, the urban community gardens are accessible to residents and the gardeners themselves are frequently local volunteers.

There is a clear focus on sharing learnings and results with the community

Going beyond community buy-in and engagement, part of every case study’s success has been a focus on sharing the results and products of the project with those communities. In Swaffham Prior, the low-carbon heating network was introduced both for environmental reasons but also to reduce heating costs by providing a lower cost alternative to oil boilers. The project learnings also created a blueprint that could be shared with other councils and communities in other parts of the country. A core part of the Welcome to Our Woods’ mission was to reconnect the community with nature through its activities like forest walks, learning sessions and locally grown food.

This was also the case in both Brooklyn and the Sadhana Forest case studies where food was being explicitly grown for the benefit of the local communities. In the urban garden example in Brooklyn, we heard examples where residents were initially unsure about bees being kept nearby but then supported the project when they received the honey they produced. With the Sadhana Forests initiative, the core purpose of the project was to grow fruit trees to provide nutrition to climate-vulnerable and under-nourished communities.

⁸ <https://www.ippr.org/public/news-and-media/press-releases/cambridgeshire-fens-citizens-call-for-bold-ideas-and-leadership-in-response-to-climate-crisis>

The route to a sustainable business model can vary but some form of funding and coordination is essential to all of them

While each community-led project we heard from had varied business models, funding, investment, and coordination was essential to each one, something which previous IPPR work looking at other international just transition case studies such as in Canada and Sweden has also found.⁹ In this instance, in Wales and Swaffham Prior, though both projects were hoping to eventually operate on a commercial basis, they were initially supported by grant funding and support from local councils. In Swaffham Prior in particular, the experience of the Local Energy Hubs and support from the County Council were cited as being key to developing the business model for their heat network.

Though more varied, the Sadhana Forest initiative still depended on funding from a range of sources from small donations from international institutions like the World Bank. Its model also functioned because of the low operating costs and coordination of many different volunteers working on the project. Lastly, while the community gardens in Brooklyn had received support from the New York parks department, they operated largely on donations and volunteers.

Engaging with the community can also lead to resistance

Getting community buy-in can be difficult if part of the community is resistant to the fundamental basis for action. In Swaffham Prior, though one of the main benefits of developing renewably sourced heat network was to reduce energy bills, some members of the community objected to the need for it, viewing it primarily as a project motivated primarily by climate change. Some either denied this was a problem or thought that their own personal actions were already sufficient to addressing climate change and that this project would be unnecessary as a result.

To support community action, a key finding from this case study was that national communication of the importance of addressing climate change could support community projects by bringing everyone up to the same baseline of understanding.

⁹ <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-12/lessons-learned-dec2020.pdf>

NEXT STEPS

While just transitions will need to be tailored to suit each countries' circumstances, these common learnings suggest greater collaboration could help to develop just transition blueprints and standards for best practice. There are three ways in which this collaboration could manifest.

The first is domestic collaboration between the different tiers of government: there is a clear need to bring together national government transition plans with local, community-led examples. While the local transition examples we heard from were great success stories, it will be important in future to have a national framework that both encourages further community examples through funding support but also helps them to understand how their projects are contributing to nationwide targets. In tandem, these national frameworks will also need to set out where just transition projects will need to be state-led but community-engaged (eg transition plans for large-scale energy-intensive industries) rather than community-led and state-informed (ie local projects fitting within a national framework).

The second avenue for collaboration is between nations with similar economic circumstances. From these case studies, one example could be greater collaboration between the UK and Germany to understand successes and challenges in Germany and how this could apply to the UK context, particularly with regards to the need for clear industrial strategy, union involvement in social dialogue and regional economic diversification.

The third opportunity for collaboration is on an international level at future COPs. The start of this briefing highlighted how just transition principles and language meant different things to different countries, even despite many countries agreeing to it in theory. From learning from these case studies, differences in economic circumstances and the structure of different economies have clearly been a factor in determining the extent to which just transitions can be successfully implemented. These differences are already recognised within COP negotiations as differentiated responsibilities, but implementation will not only require greater commitments from developed nations in terms of financing, but also greater knowledge sharing of how just transitions may be implemented. We hope these case studies offer some examples and learnings for how this can be achieved.

WORKSHOPS OVERVIEW

Session 1: Just transitions examples around the world

Professor Kwabena Anaman, professor of economics, University of Ghana

Professor Kwabena Anaman spoke about the implementation of just transition principles within Ghanaian government agencies. In particular, he spoke about how the rationale for embedding a just transition was not just for job creation, but also for improved livelihoods. He noted that even where just transition language was not explicit in the state planning agency, similar principles were being embedded within this department

Dr Hanna Brauers, research associate, TU Berlin

Dr Hanna Brauers spoke about the transition of hard coal,¹⁰ characterised by long-term economic decline over 60 years from the 1950s onwards, and the more rapid planned phase-out of lignite mining which is being driven more by climate policy. She spoke about the key factors in achieving a transition away from these industries including: combining multi-level coordinated governance; engagement with workers, employers, unions and the local community to achieve buy in for changes; a co-developed plan for economic diversification backed by public sector investment; and a strong social security system to support job losses.

Tari Lestari, associate researcher, Dala Institute for Environment and Society, Indonesia

Tari Lestari spoke about nascent just transition approaches within Indonesia. She noted that while the government had signed up to the Silesia Declaration which commits to embedding a just transition within policy going forward, the concept was still relatively new to many stakeholders. In particular, she highlighted the challenge that Indonesia is a major coal exporter and contributes significantly to the overall economy and the jobs and livelihoods of communities in West and East Kalimantan and South Sumatra.

Nithi Nesadurai, president, Environmental Protection Society Malaysia and regional coordinator of Climate Action Network Southeast Asia

Nithi Nesadurai spoke about the Climate Action Network's work with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to raise awareness of the language of just transition to climate negotiators. He noted in particular that the concept was still a relatively unfamiliar term to many stakeholders. The group has also started work with stakeholders and communities in the Indonesian coal regions of East Kalimantan and South Sumatra to begin to engage with them and co-develop a just transition plan to move away from coal. A key aspect of this engagement has been to go beyond the 'tripartite' approach of engaging employers, workers, and government, by engaging the wider community and

¹⁰ Also known as anthracite, this type of coal has the highest carbon content of any coal used in power generation.

people in the region whose livelihoods will be most affected by industrial transitions.

Jan Philipp Rohde, unionist, DGB, German Trade Union Confederation

Jan Philipp Rode spoke about the development of the Coal Commission in Germany as a means of facilitating a just transition for lignite mining in affected regions. Though policy decisions to phase out coal were initially met with resistance and had a shorter timeline (as Dr Brauers noted) for the transition, the creation of the Coal Commission helped to bring together key stakeholders, including employers, workers, unions and other local industry and community members. The result was an extensive co-developed statement from the Coal Commission which committed to a managed transition with all stakeholders signing up to the agreement.

Session 2: Community-led examples of just transition

Ian Thomas, director, Welcome to Our Woods, Wales

Ian Thomas spoke about the Welcome to Our Woods project which has used lottery funding to develop public estate land into two woodlands and a mini hydroelectric facility. The lands are designed as a community space and the project runs activities which invite people to experience the woodlands and take part in other community and education activities. More recently, the project has expanded to cover more sizeable areas of forest with the intention of creating a sawmill to produce sustainable, locally sourced wood for use in buildings.

Aviram Rozin, project leader, Sadhana Forest Kenya

Aviram Rozin spoke about the Sadhana Forest initiative which is a volunteer network that works with local indigenous peoples to grow fruit trees in arid landscapes. Growing these trees helps to provide a vital food source for these communities that risk malnourishment and are some of the most exposed to climate change due to the increased frequency and severity of drought seasons. The tree-planting is guided by the communities themselves and there is a focus on planting resilient vegetation that can withstand future climatic events.

Emma Fletcher, chair, Swaffham Prior Community Land Trust

Emma Fletcher spoke about the construction of a community-based heat network, powered by renewable sources of heat such as ground and air source heat pumps. She noted that this project, while intending to address climate change, also had an explicit aim to tackle fuel poverty as many homes in the local community used expensive oil or LPG boilers. The plan for the heat network is not only to replace these boilers and offer cheaper heating and electricity at a fixed price, but also to share learnings with other communities so that they can carry out these works too.

Ena K McPherson, founder and lead gardener, Urban Community Gardens in Brooklyn

Ena K McPherson spoke about the urban community gardens that she has been growing in central Brooklyn for over two decades. With the support of the city's parks department and occasional donations from members of the community, the gardens operate through volunteers and are explicit about their availability and accessibility to members of the local community. This openness has helped to create local buy-in, overcome any initial resistance, and has helped to resist external pressures to develop the spaces into new real estate.

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