



Unpacking “the how” of just transition practices

Highlights from the 4th Just Transition Dialogue 2022



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Authors/team

Thies Reemer (eds.), Yael van Assendelft, Monica van Alphen, Ingrid Coninx, Marijke Dijkshoorn-Dekker, Eunice Likoko, Tossa Harding, Esther Koopmanschap, Bertram de Rooij, Emma Termeer

Design

Bertram de Rooij

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Community participation in Uganda
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Introduction

As governments step up their efforts to adapt food systems to climate change, it increasingly becomes clear that these adaptations can have negative social impacts. The concept of Just Transition is therefore increasingly taken up at policy levels. Yet, the “how” question remains largely unanswered. The fourth in a series of online dialogues on Just Transition organised by Wageningen University & Research brought together a group of 26 practitioners, scientists and experts from around 10 countries on the 26th of November to unpack the “how” of Just Transition practice.

The dialogue sought to understand:

- Who is driving actual change towards justice in transition processes?
- How is it done in practice?
- What works and what doesn't work?
- Just Transition appears to be very complex, what can be done to make it manageable?

This would contribute to insights in what is truly needed for full engagement for just transitions across society.

Two guest speakers spoke about their practical experiences and strategies for just transitions, and reflected on what worked, and lessons learned:

- Maggie Makanza, Gender and Social Protection Specialist for FAO (UN), Zimbabwe. Supports the mainstreaming of gender using the GALS methodology in agricultural livelihood projects.
- Dr. Marianne Maghenda, Taita Taveta University, Kenya. School of Agricultural, Earth & Environmental Sciences.

As part of the group work, a number of resource persons shared their experience(s) to kickstart the discussion in the groups, where participants could express their views and come up with new ideas. The insights were discussed and shared again in plenary and captured in this report.

"It is easier to transition to local solutions rather than to bring global solutions to local actors"

Maggie Makanza





Figure 1
 "Dream Tree" with symbols for local priorities for change. The colours of the "fruits" indicate community-managed initiative (red), self-initiative that would accelerate with external support (orange), and things that require external support.

Figure 2
 Community meeting in Eastern Zimbabwe after mapping water catchments for building resilience to climate change.



Four types of justice are recognised in the initiative:

- **Recognitional justice**

Firstly, the project did not treat households as a black box. Intra-household relations and inequalities were addressed, and resilient households were regarded as the foundation for collective action to adapt to climate change. The situation of disadvantaged individuals – particularly women and girls who carry the highest burden of coping with climate change - was recognised as a starting point for change. Secondly, local and/or indigenous knowledge was recognised and valued in the project, as it was designed to build on local values related to watersheds and sacred forests.

- **Procedural justice**

The project made a point of enabling local communities to articulate their aspirations for change, and creating platforms to present their own adaptation strategies to local authorities and to negotiate external support for issues beyond their sphere of control.

- **Distributive justice**

By addressing social and gender inequalities, the project addressed the unequal burden on women to cope with climate change, and increased women's decision making power in order to have a more equal share of income from farming.

- **Restorative justice**

The footprint of local communities on the ecology and their contribution to climate change is very limited, yet they are disproportionately affected by its impacts. There are no mechanisms for the biggest contributors to climate change to compensate for the harm done. Yet, the process gave the local communities a voice at local and national level, which in future can be used to flag issues at the international level.

Practical approaches

Mobilisation and social change for locally-led adaptation in Zimbabwe

Maggie Makanza shared her experience in the Zimbabwe Cyclone Recovery Project, funded by the World Bank. After Cyclone Idai in 2019, other devastating cyclones struck the eastern part of Zimbabwe recently, bringing a lot of damage to the region. Local stakeholders attribute these to climate change. The case that she presented demonstrated how a project can mobilise local communities in a transition to create locally-led climate change adaptation strategies, and to negotiate support from the authorities for the issues that are beyond their sphere of control.

She made the case that household resilience is the foundation for strong locally-led adaptation strategies. Starting from inequalities between women and men and intra-household relations such as the unfair gendered division of labour and sharing of benefits, unequal decision making about income, expenditures and assets, gender based violence and inefficiency due to lack of joint planning. Addressing these issues directly builds household capacity and resilience to plan and adapt to change. Some prevention measures, issues or impacts related to drought, floods and cyclones are beyond their sphere of control. The “Dream Tree” visioning exercise was invented to empower communities take action on broader development goals, by developing aspirations as a community. By articulating what they can do without external help to address what is within their control, local communities could clearly distinguish what external support is needed. The Gender Action Learning System (GALS)⁶ was used as the core methodology. The locally led adaptation strategies were built around a “Vision Journey” roadmap with plans and actions at four levels (individual livelihood, household gender relations, climate change adaptation and enabling environment).

Involving 2500 households from local communities in the assessment of impacts of cyclones, community mapping of micro catchment area was essential to create community ownership of the process. It enabled them to prioritise and agree on what they can do, and present their plans to local authorities and negotiate their support. The absence of the private sector plantation owners using adjacent land for plantations however was glaring and requires more effort.

The strategies included watershed rehabilitation, protection of sacred forests, adopting agro-ecological farming principles and practices. The evident disproportionate burden on women (70% of the participants) to deal with the impacts of climate change was due to gender norms and needed to be addressed alongside adaptation initiatives like establishment of vegetation strips and re-planting of indigenous trees. Local and indigenous knowledge of managing the environment was combined with external knowledge of agro-ecological farming practices such as organic manure, seeds multiplication and livestock feed production. Push back from technical officers refusing to value local and indigenous knowledge was a challenge that required attention. Farmers benefitted from increasing productivity on smaller plots of land than before.

⁶ <https://empoweratscale.org>; <https://gamechangenetwork.org/gender-empowerment/galsatscale/>

Strengthening local research capacities for climate change adaptation in Kenya

Dr. Marianne Maghenda shared the Taita Rice project funded by the national research fund of the Kenyan Government. The aim was to strengthen local stakeholders research capacity to adapt to climate change through enhanced rice varieties dealing with low and erratic rainfall. Through the project, local communities analysed their land use capabilities and production mechanism as households and groups. Experimental plots involved farmers in learning activities about varieties. The majority of the participants was disadvantaged in terms of literacy and unable to read or write. They were trained to do their own soil surveys, so that samples could be analysed by the project. Justice related challenges included that women hardly own land and therefore hardly control income from the land. Yet women are highly involved in the farm labour. Gender and social discrimination and inequalities in accessing inputs, information, mechanisation and markets also block farmers to adapt to drought, flooding and other climate change related impacts.

What really worked, and could therefore be referred to as good practices, was truly engaging with communities and making the extra effort of really understanding their situation, their coping mechanisms and the issues on their farms. This was critical for the rice project to “take off”. Addressing issues of communication and collaboration between local communities and county government and other authorities also paid off. Farmer field schools triggered the self-help capacity of the participants because they learned from their fellow farmers rather than from external experts. Win-win situations came from the exchanges between farmers and students of the university.

Value addition by processing rice rather than selling the raw material caused a breakthrough for farmers. Realising that a narrow project focus would not lead to results, issues of access to clean water were addressed alongside the project activities. A huge challenge was that young people were not motivated to spend time on farming, especially since they often do not own any land. A deliberate strategy to help young people to organise themselves in cooperatives and groups helped them to strengthen collective action and their motivation for sustainable farming.



Figure 3
Involving women in the Taita Rice project to address issues related to land and labour. Taita Taveta University, Kenya.

Confrontation & dialogue

Human rights and legal support in Uganda

David Kabanda shared about his work with the Center for Food and adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT) based in Uganda. CEFROHT approaches transitions from a legal support and litigation angle, mainly focusing on issues of women's access and use of land and land rights violations, rights to adequate food, inequalities in the division of labour between gender, age and other groups, and workers' rights. Reflecting on the approaches that seem to work, he mentioned the use of evidence to confront civil servants or perpetrators of the human right violations. Corporate and political elites and other perpetrators of food and land rights need to be held accountable. At the same time, policy dialogue – sometimes involving the same stakeholders - needs to continue. This is a balancing act, but it is necessary to keep the space for policy advocacy open. Relying on political processes has not resulted in much success, due to the vested interests that block change. Yet, empowering rights-holders to claim their rights needs to go hand in hand with supporting duty bearers to meet their obligations.

Raising awareness of small enterprises

in India's energy transition

World Resources Institute (WRI) India, represented by Shubhangi Gupta, shared WRI's experience with small and medium enterprises (SMEs). She focused on the shift in the automotive sector towards electric vehicles as part of the energy transition driven by the government's climate ambitions. She started with noting that 90% of the SMEs in India are small to extremely small. Typically, these are informal and vulnerable enterprises that will be affected by the transition. How can they adjust their businesses? The approach of WRI with SME cluster in Chennai is to raise awareness about the implications of the transition to electric vehicles, so they can assess their risks, explore how to adapt, or find alternatives. Building resilience in this case requires access to technology, microfinance, reskilling and upskilling.

The difficulty with this approach is in the first place reaching the most vulnerable SME (part of recognitional justice): they are not represented by SME clusters/unions, they are informal in nature and not captured by national datasets. The field work WRI India invested in was challenged by the lack of time and interest particularly of the small enterprises: most small enterprises survive from day to day and do not have the space or platforms to think about the longer term. The sector is male dominated, and it is hard to find ways to fit women in. Apart from the small enterprises, informal workers and migrant workers are very hard to reach since they are also not represented by unions or connected to a social structure or safety nets, and yet they face large risks as part of the transition.

Community dialogues and school of ecology: climate justice in Nigeria

Cadmus Atake-Enade represented the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) based in Nigeria, an ecological think tank organisation advocating for climate justice and food sovereignty in the country and Africa at large. HOMEF's approach is to identify and address systemic causes of environmental and food related challenges, in the social, political and economic sphere. HOMEF focus is on i) "Fossil politics / climate change" (impacts on communities and its relationships/contributions to climate change), ii) "Hunger politics" (food security, GMOs, biodiversity, the right to healthy food), "Ikike Sustainability Academy" (creating spaces for knowledge generation and sharing on these topics). What worked? Interactive community dialogues and conversations and the "school of ecology" within vulnerable communities. These activities strengthen their voice to resist extractive industries, and the many types of extractive activities that affect their lives now and in the future. Cadmus recommended to focus on ensuring participation of vulnerable groups in decision making on transition processes to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Other ideas

The idea of "Citizen Assemblies" or "Neighbourhood Assemblies" was mentioned as an approach for involving citizens in making transitions more just. To prevent domination by elites, a targeting strategy is needed for this, and it requires an open space where real influence on decisions is made possible by design (as opposed to so token participation or consultation without considering the outcomes in decisions). For recognitional justice, deep listening and the use of local / appropriate language is important to understand local values and perceptions about the current situation and the aspirations and ideas for the future. The use of drawings and visuals rather than written words works to overcome power imbalances between individuals and groups in society who have different interests. Examples like the Solar Mama's ⁶, Barefoot College show that by training women -who are unable to read or write- to become solar engineers, the most marginalised communities can increase their control of transition processes. Value Sensitive Design⁷ was also mentioned for the ethical design of technologies that help in sustainability and food system transitions, since it positions citizens as active change agents and this creates a sense of ownership for technical solutions. Multi-stakeholder partnerships⁸ (MSPs) were also mentioned as a way to engage stakeholders in change processes.

"When looking at who will be affected negatively by a transition, we have to consider those who are in really vulnerable positions and those who are in a powerful position and who actually need to be negatively affected as we move forward"

Adina Dumitro, European Environment Agency

⁶ <https://www.barefootcollege.org/solution/solar/>

⁷ <https://faculty.washington.edu/pkahn/articles/vsd-theory-methods-tr.pdf>

⁸ <https://msgguide.org/>

ARE WE INTO TRANSITION?

Conditions and people driving practice

From “compensation add-on” to inherently just participatory approaches

Two participants⁶ involved in research and policy advice reflected on the practical approaches they heard. They both realised – although using different words – that just transition is often interpreted narrowly as compensation for groups that are negatively affected by transition measures. With that narrow interpretation, Just Transition practices are seen as optional add-on measures to already planned transition processes, to integrate justice. This influences how budgets flowing from Just Transition policies are allocated, and what interventions are employed tagged as Just Transition practice.

What if we embrace the idea of inherently just practices that are necessary for there to be a transition? Most of the approaches presented during the dialogue could not really be directly linked to one specific transition in a specific country, led by, for example, the national government (except for the India case). The cases showed how people can be mobilised to create the social and more technically oriented changes that are needed for sustainability transitions, and challenging the power holders who currently benefit from the status quo to change their practices.

Who is driving the actual change process?

Going beyond the narrow interpretation of Just Transition also means recognising new actors who are driving Just Transition practice. To unpack who are driving actual changes towards justice in transition, we need to accept that there is a vast grey area. Locally-led initiatives can be easily dismissed as irrelevant, especially when it is hard to pinpoint in what specific transition process these take place. When cross-boundary impacts of climate change are involved (for examples the cyclones in the Zimbabwe case) it is hard to pinpoint a specific transition that is involved. Some organisations, individuals and institutes may be unaware of the relevance of their work for just transitions, and may not refer to this concept while actually having major answers to the “how” question that was central in the dialogue.

In some cases, the actual changes may be driven by government agencies and large companies. However, these can also block justice initiatives because of vested interests in maintaining the status quo. In other cases, community-based organisations or local multi-stakeholder partnerships may be in the driving seat of locally-led adaptation strategies that fully embody the principles of a just transition. One participant⁷ wondered how different voices can become influential, and reflected that much remains to be explored about the (potential) role of social movements and activist movements and the creation of alternative governance spaces. When engaging with political processes does not pay off, new governance spaces can be created through social movements or multi-stakeholder platforms. If movements such as Black Lives Matter and Me Too can shift the playing field and reshape politics, business and life, why not for sustainability transitions and food systems?

6 Adina Dumitro of the European Environment Agency and Willow Sommer of Metabolic consultancy for sustainability transitions

7 Joost Guijt, knowledge manager at WCDI, WUR



Figure 4
*University students in the rice fields.
Kenya, Taita Taveta University.*

"It is very complex, but it can be broken down in consumables that can make a difference"

*Dr. Marianne Maghenda, PhD. Taita Taveta
University, Kenya*

Ways forward

Changing the narrative

Inherently just practices, such as mobilising people to change social inequalities to enable locally-led adaptation, strengthening local research capacities and community dialogues, need to be brought to the policy table to shape the direction of transitions. Policy makers should move away from a narrow definition of just transition as a mere compensation mechanisms for groups that are negatively affected by transition measures. The idea of enabling local communities to invent and drive transitions measures needs to be embraced, in other words mobilising local populations to co-own the transition process.

Transitioning to local solutions

Likewise, investment funds for Just Transition should embrace the idea of mobilising citizens to come up with their solutions, to increase the number of locally-owned initiatives that have the financial resources to expand. For this, existing inherently just practices that support “change from within” (rather than imposed) need to be recognised. It is easier to transition to local solutions, rather than to bring global solutions to local actors. For this purpose, an environment and platforms need to be developed for policy makers, international agencies and government implementors to learn from communities.

Local solutions and local initiatives deserve much more attention and support, as these can help to level the playing field when corporate or political elites who benefit from the status quo are actually blocking change. A dual approach of confrontation with evidence and constructive policy dialogues – with human right organisations as allies - keeps the door for change open.

Recognising the practitioners

For practitioners who have been working on justice related issues for decades it is not always clear that they actually (or could potentially) play important roles in making transitions more just. Enabling practitioners to position their work strategically in transitions could give a significant boost to the experience base of just transition practice. If investment funds, policy makers and researchers make an extra effort to recognise these experiences and practitioners, the “how” questions become much easier to address.

Make cross-boundary impacts of transition visible

In order to move away from a narrow understanding of Just Transition, cross-boundary impacts of climate change and transition processes need to be made more visible. A systems approach is needed to spot trade-offs affecting communities in countries on the other side of the globe compared to the countries where the transition is being governed.



Figure 5
Pastoralists in Niger give cause for alarm
(photo credits: WFP/Rein Skullerud via Flickr.com)

Making it manageable

Citizen participation can be scary for governments and authorities in general. Yet, tools to enable local communities to diagnose and analyse climate change impacts and plan how to adapt, can create the local ownership that authorities need in order to progress with adaptation to climate change. Approaches and participatory tools to enable local communities to determine what they can do by themselves and what is within their sphere of control, can also be extremely useful in determining what external support is needed. To mobilise citizens to participate, is essential to trigger a feeling of need and sense of urgency to act, and to build trust by being transparent about the influence citizens have in solutions and decisions about the way forward.

Targeting the most vulnerable populations requires moving beyond the trade unions and the established representative structures of workers or citizens, in order to include people working in the informal sector and seasonal and migrant workers. To make this manageable, targeting or inclusion strategies need to be included in the design of interventions and programmes.

The wealth of practices shared in less than two hours suggests that much more experience is out there that has perhaps never been framed as “just transition” practice. Examples were given of community-led watershed management practices, citizen assemblies, empowering marginalised groups through participatory action learning, addressing gender issues in adaptation processes, legal instruments and social protection. From the reflection participants concluded that marginalised individuals and groups may hold the best solutions based on ‘lived’ experiences, and this is why it is so important to magnify unheard voices.





Wageningen University & Research
P.O. Box 47
6700 AB Wageningen
The Netherlands
T +31 (0) 317 48 07 00
www.wur.eu

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