Time to
be more radical

What conditions are needed for justice in transitions?

Highlights from the 2nd Just Transition Dialogue 2022

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Introduction

On the 8th of June 2022, a group of 35 researchers, practitioners, and policy makers from around 10 countries met in an online dialogue about justice in sustainability transitions.

The "Just transition" concept is increasingly used in policy documents. It refers to incorporating elements of social justice into transition processes towards sustainability, for example in climate change adaptation and food systems.

The Just Transition discourse is growing. Policy makers and practitioners are increasingly aware that interventions to adapt to climate change and work towards more sustainable food systems can also have negative social impacts. Deliberate transitions in one country or with one target group can have (positive or negative) impacts on other groups or in other countries. These impacts can be intended or unintended, or even unconscious. Human rights can be violated and opportunities for transformation can be missed.

The dialogue on the 8th of June aimed to identify social impacts of transitions on different stakeholders and how conditions can be created to make sure no one is left behind.

Three practical cases from different contexts were used to place the dialogue into contexts:

- Ulka Kelkar from World Resources Institute (WRI) India with colleagues and partners Vishwajeet Poojary and Ashwini Hingne gave the example of Pavagada Solar Park. A milestone in India's low carbon transition, in which landowners were compensated but led to severe and lasting negative social impacts for the landless who were invisible as stakeholders.

- Marion Herens from Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI) illustrated the importance of not just delivering projects as designed but recognising and addressing issues as they come up in dialogue with the stakeholders. She used the example of the Dhaka Food System (DFS) Project in Bangladesh, where concerns about food are put on the urban agenda.

- Fatima Vally from Mining Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA) stressed that social impacts do not end at the border, and that conventional systems for consultation and negotiation need to be urgently challenged. The rise in e-bikes and electric vehicles a success in the Dutch energy transition? The dark side is the increased violence and abuse in mining communities in South Africa where manganese is extracted to meet the increasing demand for batteries. How much more injustice are we not aware of?

"Those who do not have any land to lease, they don't get any benefits. But they were depending on that land for wage labour, or for grazing their animals for earning a livelihood from pastoralism."
Ulka Kelkar, WRI India

Solar panels Pavagada in Tumakuru district of Karnataka (photo credits: Pushkar V via Flickr.com)

What is known about the social impacts of transitions?

Examples from India, Bangladesh and South Africa

Ulka Kelkar and colleagues shared the story of including the landless for more just and equitable energy transitions using the example of Pavagada Solar Park in southern India[1]. The workers involved are obviously impacted. The approximately 1,5 million coal mining jobs in India are generally not decent, born out of a lack of choices with poor working conditions and negative environmental impacts. When they lose their jobs, questions arise about skills for new green jobs and preparedness of industries to facilitate (largely informal sector) workers transition to green jobs.

Obvious are also the concerns about land claims. Solar parks compete with farming, grazing and ecosystems. Impacts on landowners in the targeted 13,000-acre area were on the agenda, leading to lease agreements to compensate the 3000 landowners for their loss of income. This however did not cater for lost social infrastructure and employment: only 8% of the people managed to get employed in the new green job, of which 80% consisted of higher caste landowners. Landless people were forgotten. There semi-nomadic pastoralists, migrants, low caste groups and women wage workers on farms are denied property ownership rights and are not able or allowed to travel far from their homes. The impact on them was profound. They lost the land they were using informally for farming and grazing to sustain their livelihoods, and very few of them found employment in the solar park. As the solar park is fenced, distance became an issue especially for women grazing their animals and depending on wage labour.

Marion Herens provided another perspective of transitions in Asia: a FAO-WUR project aiming to improve the food system of Dhaka, the lively and crowded capital of Bangladesh[2]. Different from the India case, positive social impacts are embedded in the aims of this transition initiative, particularly to ensure that all current and future citizens have access to sufficient safe, healthy, and nutritious food. It emerged in response to the absence of food related issues on the urban policy agenda, and the lack of collaboration between government agencies on the food system.

Fatima Vally from MACUA in South Africa enriched the discussion by presenting a totally different angle of social impacts of transitions. Mining communities in South Africa are facing the consequences of the huge rise in demand for manganese in Europe for batteries particularly for electric cars and bicycles[3]. Local communities are not benefitting from the increased demand. On the contrary: the increased demand goes hand in hand with a rise in human rights violations and tensions between workers and communities. Women and girls are disproportionally affected. The right of local people to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) was denied at a massive scale. Chiefs are sometimes consulted; however, these seldom represent the interests of women and girls in their community. Communities living near mining projects face serious health related threats, such as exposure to asbestosis, respiratory diseases, and longer distance to water of decreasing quality. Mining uses a lot of water, also in water scarce areas like Kalahari. With the influx of workers, the rates of sexual violence against women and girls increased notably. Fetching water is considered a women's task and the longer distance increases the risk of sexual violence.

1   https://www.wri.org/update/india-large-scale-solar-park-drought-prone-agricultural-land
2   https://www.wur.nl/en/Research-Results/Research-Institutes/centre-for-development-innovation/show-cdi/Improving-Dhakas-food-system.htm
3   https://actionaid.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ActionAid_MangaanRaport_Lowres-FINAL.pdf

> "Don't just deliver projects as designed up front, but we try to address issues upcoming in dialogue with the city corporations to seek to work hand in hand. I think that is the real transition: having cities concerned about food in the city and having the city working groups."
> *Marion Herens, WCDI*

Micro Market -Dhaka mother and child (2007)
(photo credits: Michael Foley via Flickr.com)

Conditions to make sure no one is left behind

The cases helped to identify some conditions. For the India case, co-existence of farming and grazing (sheep) with solar farms is being investigated, for which collaboration and business models are needed. Rural employment guarantee schemes exist, but these would need to enrol landless people in reskilling programmes. For this, women would need safe accommodation, transport, and childcare facilities, for which companies could take responsibility. Rooftop solar power would prevent social impacts. Increasing offshore wind energy would be a solution but only if it becomes more affordable. It is essential to involve vulnerable groups in developing solutions to reduce social impacts.

Coordination and collaboration between government agencies are among the key conditions in Dhaka to improve the food system. That is why under the project, City Working Groups were established working on identifying and addressing the current pressing food system concerns. Vulnerable groups – particularly women and households in poor neighbourhoods - are targeted with solutions like urban and roof top gardening, nutrition campaigns; upgrading fresh markets (food safety, consumer awareness, online food platforms, mobile courts monitoring food safety); reducing food loss and waste (training market committees, pilot waste segregation, biogas digesters, valorising organic waste for feed). In parallel to addressing current food system concerns, it is important to also build a perspective of Dhaka's food system in the future to drive transitions, based on foresight, scenario planning and modelling, spatial planning, and socio-economic projections. In the DFS project this is translating into the Dhaka Food Agenda 2041.

Negative social norms attached to socially ascribed identities influence the magnitude of the negative impact of transitions on vulnerable groups. Challenge social norms that reinforce vulnerability of specific groups, such as negative norms around single women. This needs to be acknowledged and addressed with cultural sensitivity.

Small group discussions zoomed in to specific conditions for types of justice: distributive, procedural, intergenerational & restorative recognitional justice.

Distributive justice

What conditions help to create a better distribution of impacts among people? What is needed to make sure these conditions are in place? What do we need to do differently?

Benefits and burdens of transitions should be shared equitably and proportionally. Compensation mechanisms are potentially helpful in this – such as the lease agreements for landowners in the solar park case in India. However, conditions need to be met for these to include marginalised groups – such as the landless.
The group argued that distributing benefits and burdens equitably requires a deliberate approach to work with the informal sector, in which communities or stakeholder groups represent themselves (as opposed to the formal sector). It needs to go beyond labour unions. It is paramount that policy makers and leaders understand the informal sector. Co-creation with local communities and stakeholder groups is key. Innovation and research need to go hand in hand. Low-income groups should be consistently considered when developing products like solar based options for cooking, transport, production, and consumption) so that these become accessible. Microcredit for low-income groups may also help to level the playing field.
When land claims are involved, arrangements for landless people are needed such as share-based systems and co-ownership, or otherwise skills building and opportunities for new jobs. Affected communities need to be trusted to know what they need, and an attitude of "complementing" with external research to locally set priorities is required. In many cases this may require a shift in the mindset of public and private organisations. In the same spirit, accountability frameworks are needed to enable feedback from communities and monitor the government and prevent lip service.

Powerful companies and government agencies working on transitions need to establish clear mechanisms for participation of less powerful groups such as black women in mining communities in South Africa. Coordination between stakeholders can prevent conflict. The way marginalised groups are represented determines their influence in the distribution of benefits and burdens. Marginalised groups are often not well organised and represented, and there is a risk of tokenism. Conventional representation systems (such as the chiefs) therefore need to be challenged.

As observed in the India case, differentiation of social groups is very much needed. "The landless" were differentiated into women or men landless informal farm workers, migrants, and pastoralists. These social groups have diverse needs and capacities to adapt to climate change as well as the interventions brought to them as part of transitions, such as the differences in freedom of movement between landless men and landless women. Distributive justice works different for cross-boundary cases. How to share wins and losses between European countries and South Africa? What basis and standards could be applied for compensation?

> "is a transition in the West 'merely' swapping our technologies (fossil fuel based for electric cars) or also a transition in our lifestyles so that they become less resource-intensive in the first place?"
> *Auke Pols, WUR*

Procedural justice

What conditions help to better engage certain groups of people? What is needed to make sure these conditions are in place? What do we need to do differently?

The discussion focused on participatory approaches to increase the involvement and voice of stakeholder groups in specific contexts. Power disparities and differences in levels of organisation need to be recognised, as these determine how these groups can negotiate.
The India and South Africa cases demonstrated that procedures for justice are often lacking or failing to increase the involvement of marginalised groups. The Dhaka food system initiative is partly a response to this. In such cases - where procedures are put in place - a key condition is that the effectiveness is evaluated throughout the lifespan of the initiative, so that procedures can be adapted should these fail to engage marginalised groups. There is a need for recurrent impact, barrier, and stakeholder analysis to reflect whether everyone is represented and heard, and whether the process is just for all involved.
Procedures are void if people do not use them. Stakeholders need to feel that their vision, motives, values, and interest are considered, so that they can commit themselves to these procedures. It is not enough to ensure all stakeholders are present around the table. Those present need to represent interests of their stakeholder group, and they need to be empowered to meaningfully participate. Alignment of norms and values is needed for this. Stakeholders who are enabled to express their views but who do not see any influence in decisions for designing and implementing procedures will drop out. People also need to feel backed up by the right data collection and analysis. Trust is gained based on how it is organised, who is collecting what, where sampling and transparency. Procedural justice requires contextual sensitivity and cannot be managed by outsiders. Who is defining justice in a specific context? Procedures and processes determine to a considerable extent who has a say in what is just.

Intergenerational and restorative justice

What conditions help to make sure that the voices of future generations are represented in the transition? What is needed to make sure these conditions are in place? What do we need to do differently? What conditions help to make sure we compensate the harm that has been done to certain groups in the past?

It is increasingly accepted that Just Transition also implies that harm done in the past to specific groups or individuals is addressed. In the case of India this would imply reaching out to the landless (with compensation or employment schemes) who already migrated to urban areas since they depended on the land now used for solar energy. In the South Africa case it would involve reparations for vulnerable groups in surrounding communities initiated by enterprises and buyers of South African manganese for batteries in Europe. Compensating in advance for actions in the future seems easier than repairing harm already done. Some even argued that in a transition process harm should only be acknowledged, before quickly moving forward to avoid the process to drag.

Looking at the future (in)justice can be understood differently: 1) as consequences of interventions on future generations (short term) and 2) negative consequences in the longer term/effects on the climate for future generations. In both cases efforts can focus on ensuring an equal voice from multiple generations discussing what justice is for whom.


Recognitional justice

What conditions help to make sure the cultural values of different groups are included in the transition?

The group agreed that it all starts with awareness that different social groups have different cultural values. Next, voices of these social groups need to be heard, recognising their specific identities, culture, values, and the context they are part of. Vague reference to "communities" should be prevented. (Potential) social impacts needs to be mapped out in the light of cultural identities, taking in consideration power relations. Where applicable, extra effort need to be done to translate into local languages. Above all, it was seen as important to explicitly discuss visions on what a desirable future looks like for groups sharing a cultural identity. A deliberate extra effort is needed to recognise informal legal structures and systems apart from the formal alone. Mining communities' voices should have a central place in climate adaptation plans and lobby and advocacy efforts.
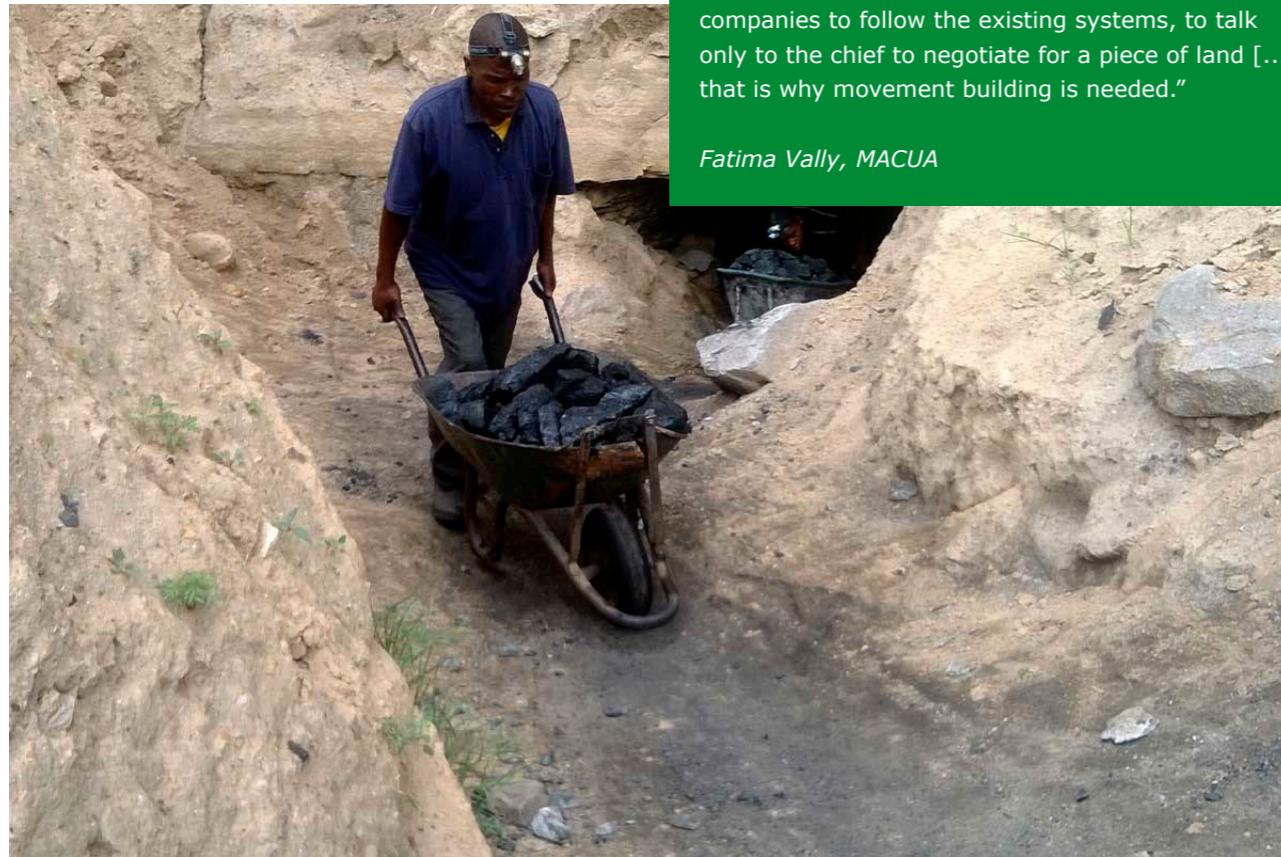
"It is in the benefit of our government and mining companies to follow the existing systems, to talk only to the chief to negotiate for a piece of land [...] that is why movement building is needed."

Fatima Vally, MACUA

Mining in South Africa
(photo credits: MACUA (Macua.org.za))

"Who is setting the agenda in transitions. In most cases, communities come on board to be consulted but the agenda has already been set. What is it that we need to do to empower communities to set the agenda rather than be recipients of the development agenda"

Maggie Makanza, FAO Zimbabwe

'Nothing about us, without us'
(photo credits: MACUA (Macua.org.za))

Gaps and the way forward

An eye opener was that many of the conditions mentioned reason from the examples of India and Bangladesh, where the transition is governed in the same geographic location as where the impacts are felt by local people (although influenced by international monetary and market systems). The negative social and health related impacts however in South African communities surrounding Manganese mines are linked to the energy transition in Europe. Are these cross-boundary cases a blind spot in policies as well?

Just transition often refers to addressing impacts related to workers' rights and rights of communities whose living environment is potentially impacted. Increased sexual violence on women and girls is hardly ever mentioned in the context of just transition. Yet there is a clear link between the increased demand for batteries for electric vehicles and bicycles in Europe and the impacts on women and girls in South African communities near to mining areas. Does this reach the policy level?

A concern raised was that if we ask to involve everyone in decision making and overload people with many things to check on the justice side, it may discourage enterprises from starting sustainability projects. The South Africa manganese mining case however with some of the highest levels of inequality being part of everyday systems clearly shows the urgency to act. It is high time to be more radical and overloaded? The mining enterprises and government entities involved will otherwise continue to follow systems (talk to the chief, who does not represent women in the community). Black women are the most vulnerable group in this case and if they indirectly "subsidise" the mining enterprises by coping with all the impacts, they need to have accessible platforms where their voice is listened to. Workers are part of communities; however, tensions are created between workers negotiating with mining companies through unions and others in these communities who have no say, up to the point of violent clashes.

Whether the transition and social impacts are in one place or across boundaries, power structures block the justice agenda for marginalised individuals and groups. How to break through these structures remains a question. **The critical question to ask is who is setting the agenda in transition processes, and how can marginalised groups become active change agents rather than recipients or victims?**

The Dhaka Food System example with the City Working Groups and the efforts of the Indian government to at least plan for landowners show that structures can be created for co-creating solutions. This could help making technologies available to low-income groups, and finding solutions related to land claims for example for solar parks on how to include communities and the landless. When social impacts do occur – like in the case of the landless in India and women and girls in South African communities – how can transition processes accommodate for stakeholder (re-)negotiation for their terms and rights? Can moments be built in for this and what is then the role for research? Should states have food system policies to accommodate just transitions at multiple levels?

Discourse is growing, but how to make justice an inherent part of the way transitions are designed and governed is yet totally unclear. There are no clear frameworks to arrange for justice in transitions. Burdens and benefits of transitions need to be equally shared. But how could this be measured and who determines the indicators?

The mission of Wageningen University & Research is "To explore the potential of nature to improve the quality of life". Under the banner Wageningen University & Research, Wageningen University and the specialised research institutes of the Wageningen Research Foundation have joined forces in contributing to finding solutions to important questions in the domain of healthy food and living environment. With its roughly 30 branches, 6,800 employees (6,000 fte) and 12,900 students, Wageningen University & Research is one of the leading organisations in its domain. The unique Wageningen approach lies in its integrated approach to issues and the collaboration between different disciplines.