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Title: Scaling The Just Transition For Community-Based and Community-Placed Projects

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the question of scaling Just Transition community projects, blending historical and empirical perspectives. Through an assessment of the the design, funding, implementation and maintenance of such projects, the paper articulates the constraints and opportunities for South Africa's historically disadvantaged communities. South Africa is indeed not new transition projects and, in some ways, can be argued to still be going through a version of its original post-Apartheid transition. Thus, by incorporating a historical perspective on South Africa's transitions, the paper reveals that there exist both contradictions and continuities which, unless addressed differently, risk producing outcomes that will reproduce the exclusion of the communities most in need of support. The conclusion, therefore, proposes ways of doing community development differently, across the value chain of project delivery. It is argued that by adopting an alternative approach to thinking about and implementing community development projects, the possibility exists to use the Just Transition as a catalyst to fulfilling the broader socio-economic objectives of the National Development Agenda, in step with the demands and urgency of the 2030 agenda.

INTRODUCTION

The question of scaling the Just Transition in South Africa, with a specific reference to community projects, is not simply an operational one. The question exists within a historical context that shapes norms and practices that govern all parties to Just Transition projects, the developers, financiers, implementors and participants/ beneficiaries.

The dominant literature on the Just Transition focuses on the journey towards a low-carbon economy, thus addressing Climate Change and in some key ways, the importance of energy transitions for the holistic project (Routledge et al., 2018). Energy transitions are not the only sectoral transitions that define the Just Transition, however this paper will have an empirical bias to such projects as they currently dominate the work that is being implemented on the ground. Just Transition literature necessarily intersects sectoral transitions with their impact on labour dynamics, appreciating that changes in technology options should be accompanied with the necessary reskilling of the labour force that would have otherwise been associated with dated modes of production (Thomas, 2021). Literature that takes a longer historical perspective goes further, acknowledging that the Just Transition coexists with other ongoing transitions including the transition towards a more educated, capable, healthier and empowered global population (Evans & Phelan, 2016). Simply, in the current global context that is dominantly framed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Just Transition is about solving for job-losses as a consequence of decarbonisation, appreciating all the intersecting concerns that frame the notion of development, such as justice, fairness and inclusivity (National Business Initiative, 2021).

In the context of South Africa, a country that has been in a formal process of transition and transformation since the late 1980s/ early 1990s, the Just Transition provides an added, environmental dimension to an existing set of processes and objectives. In this sense, the Just Transition links South Africa to a global process that reinforces its own journey. From a South African vantage point then, the Just Transition is simultaneously about Climate Change as well as poverty, unemployment and inequality, the overarching categories for a host of social and economic challenges that are rooted in the country's protracted history of exclusion and oppression. The inclusion of the environment, primarily driven by the urgency of the Climate Change crisis, is thus the inclusion of a modality to a pre-existing imperative. In other words, the Just Transition tells us *how* to go about doing what already needed to be done, as part of the country's core project, which has been defined through the lens and language of justice, redress and shared prosperity. Appreciating the existence and continuity of transition as a national project brings to focus an understanding of the approaches that have historically defined how community projects are developed, funded, implemented. This historical approach has yielded much failure. These failures, detailed in the first section, provide guidance on how not to approach Just Transition projects at the community level.

Instead, when approaching the question of scale, as it pertains to Just Transition projects, we must consider the value chain of project delivery, assessing the nature of constraints and opportunities that face the actors who participate in these projects. This value chain, comprised of project developers, funders, implementors and community members, is explored empirically, through case studies from both South Africa and other parts of the African continent. Understanding the nature of these projects, the funding that is typically availed to them as well as the capacity of their implementors, is crucial to rethinking the optimal approach to scaling the Just Transition. At the heart of community development projects lies a philosophical problem that influences how such projects are funded and executed. The notion that community projects must be done at least cost whilst also being robust enough to transfer to community members within a short timeframe, often compromises the long-term sustainability of these projects. It is thus worth avoiding, from the onset of our analysis, the potential fallacy that Just Transition community projects sit outside of the general challenges that face community projects in South Africa. Indeed, the case studies of existing Just Transition projects reveal that this fundamental problem continues to plague execution. This part of the paper, driven by primary research conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with various actors, is also comparative in nature, reviewing experiences of projects implemented in other parts of Africa, to determine the extent to which the South African experience is unique. Despite some key differences, such as the sources of funding, the effects of dated thinking about community development are ubiquitous, compromising the very projects that are required to stand as pilot cases to justify scale. This section of the paper then, through a detailed exploration of case studies, surfaces a variety of unhelpful norms related to community development projects, with a view to demonstrate the inherent problems that must be overcome to make scale a possibility.

Capital emerges as a central driver of scale. Rather than emphasise existing literature on the opportunity costs of funding smaller projects, this study interrogates perspectives of those who are already funding such projects to understand the distance between their intentions and what is practicable. The insights of financiers are especially telling as they reveal constraints related to the ultimate sources of capital, which intermediaries are limited by. There is thus a requirement for holistic changes in capital markets, pertaining to both private and public funding.

The paper concludes with a forward-looking perspective, teasing out the lessons which are critical for scaling Just Transition projects, both philosophically and perhaps more importantly, practically. Appreciating that these are co-constructing dimensions of problems, this paper seeks to demonstrate how historically constructed challenges can be overcome through key shifts in how we think about and do community development in the context of the current Just Transition.

SOUTH AFRICA'S MULTIPLE TRANSITIONS (AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE JUST TRANSITION)

In the late 1980s, South Africa entered a phase formally referred to as 'The Transition' (Van Zyl Slabbert, 2006). The transition acknowledged the pending end of Apartheid and a desired process to ensure the peaceful phasing in of a democratic dispensation (Van Zyl Slabbert, 2006). Of importance, given the desire for continuity, albeit with different aims, was the transfer of the State, in a manner that would empower the new administration to use existing institutions for the development of all South Africans (Holdt, 2013). The Transition has been, in some ways, continuous, coexisting with the formal transfer of power to the democratically elected government, reflecting the continued contestations in South African society (Holdt, 2013).

The period since 1994 has been defined by the broad mission to convert South Africa into a just, inclusive, and progressive society (Albertyn, 1994). Practically, successive administrations have sought to articulate the link between the broad societal transformation aims and the pragmatic path forward as expressed through policy and primarily, the state's role. Thus, the practical expression of the first administration's plan, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), focused its efforts on social welfare expansion and the infrastructure development of historically oppressed communities, typically defined as rural, peri-urban and township communities (Visser, 2005). This infrastructure investment was focused on expanding the availability of social infrastructure, including housing, schools, clinics and hospitals, in tandem with expanding access to economic infrastructure such as reticulated water and grid-tied electricity (Moolla et al., 2011). In a sense, it can be argued that the first administration understood its core liberatory function as related to the dignity of Black lives and the reconciliation of a society living on polar ends of racial lines. Thus, the focus on the delivery of the basic services for individuals and households to unlock their capabilities, the administration, led by President Nelson Mandela, emphasised the importance of forgiveness and unity as key attributes of the new, shared path (Veriava, 2019).

Going into the second administration, the emphasis shifted towards the macro-economy, with a more economistic contemplation of the country's development constraints taking centre stage (Adelzadeh, 1996). The then deputy, soon-to-be president Thabo Mbeki, argued, in a sitting of the general assembly in 1998, that (Veriava, 2019):

> *South Africa is a country of two nations… One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous… It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure… The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor… This nation lives under conditions of a grossly under-developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure… And neither are we becoming one nation.*

This characterisation of a country in the process of coming together, a mere 4 years into its unity project, was perhaps one of the more serious reckonings, at the level of the state and the governing party, with the fact that the country's challenges were deeper and needed more than the mere aspiration towards a rainbow nation. What would then follow was a fundamental policy shift, which focused the state's efforts on fiscal prudence, which some scholars argue was already embedded in the RDP, albeit not the explicit focus (Adelzadeh, 1996). Embedded in the 'corrective' mission of the second administration was Mbeki's articulation of South Africa, not only as a nation struggling to cohere, but as two separate economies (Skinner & Vaoldia, 2003). Mbeki argued that the majority experience of South Africa is within the second economy, which he defined as:

> *Mainly informal, marginalised, unskilled economy, populated by the unemployed and those unemployable in the formal sector". The Second Economy is caught in a "poverty trap". It is therefore unable to generate the internal savings that would enable it to achieve the high rates of investment it needs. Accordingly, on its own, it is unable to attain rates of growth that would ultimately end its condition of*

underdevelopment. (ANC Today, Volume 4, No. 47, 26 November—2 December 2004)

The notion that the South African economy contained duality in it, was not unique to Thabo Mbeki. It had been debated and challenged by earlier scholars, especially in the 1970s. Locally, a notable contribution to this debate was advanced by Harold Wolpe, who argued that South African economy was less dual in nature but rather better understood as a whole, in which a vast majority were the subject of exploitation (Skinner & Vaoldia, 2003). In essence, scholars like Harold Wolpe and indeed, Rosa Luxemburg, sought to foreground the fundamental nature of capitalism as the problem, highlighting that the exploitative nature of the system generates a community of have-nots that, albeit absent from consumption, are in fact the productive engine of the economy (Skinner & Vaoldia, 2003). Later scholars, such as Skinner and Vaoldia (2003) echo this thinking, demonstrating through their work that there is extensive exchange between the formal and informal economies and that whilst the majority are indeed located in the informal economy, this does not preclude their interactions with the formal economy and vice versa.

However, there remains analytical value in acknowledging that there are parts of the economy that enjoy the benefits of exploitation and other parts that suffer the consequences. In this sense, although fundamentally critical of the dual or two-economies notion, Hull and James (2012) argue that the existence of an exploited class that benefits little from economic exchange is pervasive across Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa's experience of these divides is less stark because it has a large (albeit shrinking) wage-labour force and the state permeates spaces that would otherwise be completely under-served and informal through its regulatory reach and power (Hull & James, 2012).

Nevertheless, there is a requirement to understand how those who benefit least from the economic order *actually* interact with it. To this end, other scholars take the perspective that thinking needs to go further than the Marxist tradition of 'complicating' the problem, towards more illuminating explanations of the phenomena of exclusion (Hull & James, 2012). In other words, for solutions to emerge, there must be a wider-reaching understanding of the processes by which exclusion persists and therefore, the actions that are required to undo the injustice. It is in this context that we start to contemplate the notion of 'community', which it is argued, must be explored alongside 'market', as well as 'local', 'house-based models of the economy' which are also to be evaluated in relation to 'corporate conceptions' (Hull & James, 2012, p2). The concept of community in the context of the economy is particularly pertinent to this study as it seeks to understand the prospects for scaling community-based Just Transition projects. The question however, is what exactly it means to combine concepts of community and corporate organisation in a single/coherent narrative in a fundamentally divided society?

Indeed, the term 'community', from a South African perspective is, like the term 'the people', a coded reference to the poor, Black majority (Veriava, 2019). By referring to the community or community-based projects, we inadvertently refer to the excluded, who are simultaneously the majority who constitute 'the people', despite, in actuality, occupying the status of 'a people', a minority, both economically and as this paper argues, in the imagining of a South African ideal.

Thus, much energy has been dedicated by various scholars to the question of duality in the South African economy, most of it critiquing the evidence-base or empirical roots of the claim (Du Toit & Neves, 2007). However, there remains little challenge to the notion that the second economy is fundamentally incapable of 'self-generating the investments' it requires for its own development as originally proposed by Thabo Mbeki. The related implication of this dilemma, when discussing South Africa, a single-country context, whose duality arises not from exchange relations with outsiders, but from an unbalanced, internal arrangement, is why it should be expected that the exploited ought generate their own investments?

Following the second administration's articulation of South Africa, was the introduction of the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP sought to propose a comprehensive, single plan for the country's development, addressing and linking everything from society to the natural environment to the macroeconomy (Karriem & Hoskins, 2016). Philosophically, the NDP was not a fundamental departure from the politics and outlook that informed the RDP and GEAR. Instead, its shift was in viewing and planning for South Africa as a single system with clear deadlines for the achievement of key targets (Karriem & Hoskins, 2016). In addition, the NDP reflected a more concerted desire to convert historically disadvantaged communities into spaces capable of 'self-generating[their needed] investments', hence the strong emphasis on rural development and in related outputs, the introduction of the concept of township economies (National Planning Commission, 2020). The use of the concept of the economy in the context of previously excluded communities expresses an expanded albeit nascent vision for 'the second economy' as needing to develop into an economy *in its own right* rather than develop into the first economy.

South Africa's socio-economic transitions therefore contain shifting ideas about previously excluded communities. Arguably, the NDP conceptualised Black communities as spaces requiring state-led infrastructural development, where GEAR questioned the ability of such communities to cohere into the more productive first economy, understanding the structural divides as more fundamental and requiring the involvement of private capital. The NDP, in its vision for these communities, locates the economy within the community, aspiring to an internal economic development ideal, not as separate from macroeconomic coherence but as a necessary feature thereof.

It is thus the primary contention of this paper that these transitioning, dominant ways of thinking about development are woven into the possibilities of the Just Transition, at the level of the community.

The question that this paper will grapple with relates to how best to think about communities in a manner that makes them attractive and viable sites for the scaling of Just Transition projects. Whilst it remains true that South Africa's poorest communities lack the necessary ability to self-generate investments, this paper will demonstrate that by understanding communities as sites of investments requires a rearticulation of community-level development. Rather than expect that all which is developed within a community must accrue entirely to that community, a shift in thinking is required, recognising that the sustainability of investments that benefit communities must still contain incentives that motivate external implementors and financiers to not only develop but maintain such projects.

The following section interrogates community development more generally, demonstrating the ways in which dated approaches, rooted in good intentions, have derailed projects. Understanding these challenges with community projects is crucial to developing an alternative framework for projects that ought to serve underprivileged communities, at scale, to achieve the objectives of the Just Transition.

CONSIDERING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SCALING THE JUST TRANSITION

The national Department of Social Development lays out the state's perspective comprehensively, stating that 'community development focuses on building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It seeks to change power structures in order to remove the barriers that prevent poor people and vulnerable individuals, such as women and children, from participating in issues that affect their lives and development'(Social Development, 2009)'. The Department goes further to outline the metrics or indicators of Community Development, which are predominantly linked to the concepts of community participation and ownership as prerequisites for long-term project sustainability (Social Development, 2009, p.5).

Per the State's vision, 'developed' communities ought to be independent, creative, resourceful and capable of sustaining their own progress. The State's vision for community development is intellectually rooted in an outlook that understands social change as deeply rooted in human capabilities or capacity. Given its importance, scholars have also dedicated time towards deconstructing the concept of capacity to generate practical meanings which can be more readily operationalised. These include empowerment and collective ability (Taylor & Clarke, 2008; Morgan, 2006). It is thus understood that human capacity is the desired engine of community development, but does it exist?

Local Capacity: Does It Exist?

The creation of capacity for development, at the most local level, remains a central challenge for sustained progress (Ul Haq, 2004). In a compelling review of a housing project undertaken in the Western Cape province of South Africa, Charlotte Lemanski highlights critical dimensions of human incapacity, that are important to consider when assessing the prospects for community development (Lemanski, 2008). Firstly, Lemanski (2008) argues that struggle for change must come from within. Community struggle is important in establishing why change is important, it links the community to the project in a manner that engenders ownership of both the desire for change as well as the ultimate fruits of struggle, being the change itself (Lemanski, 2008). In the particular case examined by Lemanski (2008), it is revealed that what is otherwise perceived as a positive social good, housing, can be subject to deep contestation and resistance, when delivered in a manner that is not consistent with the community's own perception of their needs and most pressing struggles (Lemanski, 2008). This way of thinking about community projects as the product of struggle is particularly resonant in the context of South Africa as it relates to the country's own lexicon pertaining to the work that has gone into undoing the hold that the White minority had over Black society starting with the dawn of the colonial era. Without struggle, or clearly identifiable evidence of internal desire, the long-term sustainability of community projects is precarious.

Secondly, internal community-based capacity is critical for both the immediate and long-term objectives of projects. In other words, capacity is required to initiate the projects as well as to sustain them over the long-term (Lemanski, 2008). Therefore, capacity must be understood as related to the entire life of a project, not portions thereof. This is critically important in a context such as South Africa, where, as a function of extreme inequality, there exists a greater pool of capacity and resources outside of the community contexts where development is most needed. As a consequence, projects often come from the outside, in, unaware that capacity is not just a requirement of sustaining projects but importantly and centrally, local community capacity ought to be inherent to the conceptualisation and design of projects. In keeping with Lemanski's logic, project conceptualisation ought to be the product of local struggle if the goal is to ensure sustained, community ownership and management, over time.

Empirical Review of Local Capacity

Comprehensive data on the number and nature of community-based organisations across South Africa is largely lacking. This is due to a variety of factors, including the high attrition rates of registered organisations, thus making the database of the Department of Social Development, an unreliable depiction of the reality on the ground. Further, particularly with the emergence of social entrepreneurship, community development work is not strictly undertaken by organisations with a specific type of registration. Indeed, there are privately registered organisations that are as active in community development as non-profit organisations, which historically dominated the sector. Another complicating variable is that not all community development occurs through formally registered organisations, leaving yet another aspect of the real world, unseen.

With the above points acknowledged, there is value in evaluating the data sources that do exist, to develop a broad understanding of what community development may currently look like. A consistent source in this respect is the Trialogue Handbook, which, on annual basis, evaluates both the corporate giving sector as well as the NPO sectors, to understand the linkages between them. The Trialogue report excludes privately registered social enterprises and does not specifically confirm whether the NPOs it features are local in nature or operate across communities (Trialogue, 2020). What is of interest from the most recent report are 4 dimensions that enhance our understanding of what is *actually happening* on the ground:

1. Funding per sector, identifying the target areas of funds deployed by the corporate social responsibility sector.
2. Organisation size as determined through their income levels, and
3. Organisational sophistication represented through the availability of staff for fund-raising (given this is a critical function for organisations that are not profit-generative)
4. Organisation Development Needs, as indicated through the reported capacity building needs of NPOs

In assessing the above variables, it becomes evident that funding for community development is still biased towards traditional sectors such as education and healthcare. Funding in respect of job creation and decarbonisation remains a small piece of the pie. Further, most community organisations are small and less sophisticated, as reflected through limited managerial capacity and thus a limited ability to receive and manage large-scale funding (Trialogue, 2020). What this signals is an inescapable fact- Just Transition projects that are worthy of scale will require a significant contingent of external parties who work to generate community benefit whilst not being strictly of communities.

Who Is Developing Who?

Additionally, Lemanski (2008) forces a reckoning with the impact of external involvement in community development projects. The concern is that through external involvement, albeit potentially well-intentioned and productive, communities are denied the possibility of developing the very capabilities that they require to self-actualise. This raises a variety of challenges, including a tension between that which is idealised and that which is sustainable. On the surface, if there exists a problem in one part of society for which another has the resources to address, it would seem correct for the haves to support the have-nots. Indeed, South Africa’s taxation system is based on this principle, taxing the wealthy to make redistributive investments in less privileged communities (Woolard et al., 2015). The logic, therefore, that we are bound together and responsible for each other is baked into the structure of our society. And in many other instances, we do not observe this kind of relationship as problematic. When the state delivers services, communities perceive these as valuable and indeed, often make demands for more and higher-quality services, even if the expertise and financial resources for their delivery is not dependent on local capacity (Managa, 2012). Thus, if Lemanski's contention, emanating out of a particular context and case study, is true, the question that arises relates to scenarios. In which scenarios is 'external' support more or less productive?

A phenomenon that supports Lemanski's observations is the demobilising of community capacity post 1994, with many community leaders having been 'transferred' from communities to the state, at varying levels. Indeed, many have argued that this shift 'away' from communities, can be understood, in part, as a form of betrayal (Kessel, 2010). In some respects, the removal of this capacity, away from the community and into government, stripped communities of the capacities they had to 'struggle' towards desired objectives. The capacity to effectively organise was moved into the State for good cause- to bring the demands of communities into the direct focus of the democratic South African state. But, by removing the leaders from communities, the project arguably stunted the future struggles of communities (Kessel, 2010). Therefore, where community organisers may have historically made demands related to what we now understand broadly as 'service delivery' (housing, schools, healthcare facilities, transportation etc) they are absent from the evolving challenges of communities, including the imperative to become a part of the Just Transition. Because organisers now sit as administrators, rather than as the parties directly affected by local struggles, they can be understood as co-opted and therefore, more attuned to and invested in translating the ways in which the State understands its obligations to society rather than the other way around (Kessel, 2010).

The problem of externally driven development is a persisting development challenge, not unique to South Africa. As already established, it applies differently to different issues. For example, when delivery of large-scale utility-based forms of infrastructure occurs, communities are routinely excluded from deep participation and yet that does not threaten the fundamentals of the project. Indeed, reticulated water is enjoyed, electricity is valued and tarred roads, appreciated. So there is something about a particular kind of community projects, that sits outside of a general expectation, or imagined outcome, that generates a unique kind of vulnerability to project success. One perspective suggests that it is the inability to plan for the long-term sustainability of projects that results in their failure

(Varkey, 2000). This linkage of long-term sustainability to initial planning is also observed in the context of Community-based Tourism. In a study conducted of community-based tourism in Thabo Mofutsanyana Municipality in the Free State Province, it was found that community members lacked ownership for projects where they had not been included in the initial planning (Strydom et al., 2019). It may also be a question of scale, where the size of certain projects opens them up to greater scrutiny and disruption. Visibility may also play a role, where projects that are fully located within a community context are both reliant on and susceptible to more locally-generated risks.

In a separate study, reviewing urban renewal projects in Johannesburg, it is revealed that community participation is not sufficient for creating the needed ownership of the development process (Thwala, 2009). Rather, community members need to themselves share common objectives, which, if projects are externally generated, can be overlooked, as project developers superficially 'unite' communities, unaware of inherent tensions (Thwala, 2009).

It therefore goes without question that in the absence of capable, local communities, projects are fundamentally unsustainable. It is also reasonable to view communities as sites for the generation of the investments required to sustain them. However, there perhaps exists another conceptual avenue, to enable progress amidst the historical ideals surrounding communities and the empirical record which is skewed towards failed community projects. It may be worthwhile to distinguish between *community-based* and *community-placed* projects, such that communities remain at the centre, but with different or varying expectations related to the long-term sustainability of projects. In both cases, the imperative to deliver tangible and verifiable benefit to communities remains, however, the prospect of a community-placed project may free us of the expectation that all projects that are created for the benefit of communities are for the ultimate management and ownership of those communities. By appreciating that this avenue exists, we may open ourselves to a new regulatory regime, governing the ethics of community-placed projects rather than imposing a norm, community ownership, which is not always possible to realise.

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STUDYING CASES OF JUST TRANSITION PROJECTS

Background

To ground the study in an empirical understanding of the world as it is, primary research was conducted. Seven Just Transition Projects were studied and 3 Financiers, focused on Just Transition projects, were interviewed. The table below provides a standardised summary of all the projects. A distinction is made between projects that are originated from within the community, community-based projects, versus those that are generated from outside the community, community-placed projects. This distinction is explored in greater detail in the analysis.

Project Solution/ Sector	Type of Entity	Country	Type of Community	Community-Based/ Placed	Just Transition Impact
Microgrid Development	SA-domiciled, internationally funded Private, social enterprise	Tanzania	Rural	Community Placed	Clean Energy Access
Microgrid Development	International Non-profit organisation	Uganda	Peri-Urban	Community Placed	Clean Energy Access
Microgrid Development	Private, social enterprise	Zambia	Rural	Community Placed	Clean Energy Access
Indigenous Farming/ Livelihoods	SA Non-profit organisation	South Africa	Rural	Community Placed	Land Rehabilitation & Job Creation
Indigenous Farming/ Education	SA Non-profit organisation	South Africa	Peri-Urban	Community Based	Sustainable Livelihoods & Education

City Energy Efficiency	Government Department	South Africa	Urban	Community Placed	Energy Efficiency
Schools Rooftop Solar	SA Private, social enterprise	South Africa	Peri-Urban	Community Placed	Energy Efficiency

In interviewing the project parties, the study sought to ascertain the scale and impact aspirations of the projects in tandem with the constraints and opportunities they face in achieving these goals. Projects from outside South Africa were included for comparative purposes to ascertain the key differences and learning opportunities from other geographies. The main findings from the interviews are discussed thematically, below.

Potential For Scale Sits At The Regulatory Limit

Just Transition projects, by their nature, introduce technologies and ways of generating value that are novel, to the extent that decarbonisation has not historically been central to the impetus of job creation. As a consequence, they often run into regulatory challenges, requiring changes to be made in order to enable project viability.

A key theme in this regard had to do with developing projects to the point of their regulatory 'limit' such that, in advocating for regulatory change, the potential impact of the change is partially demonstrated. This is a particularly crucial theme for smaller scale projects as they often act as the precursor to large-scale developments, proving the concept and financial viability that makes larger projects bankable. To this end, project developers find themselves creating projects that sit just below government thresholds, with the view to use the projects as evidence for what is possible. Thus, microgrid developers, by way of example, develop projects that sit below the licensing thresholds of the State, in a bid to make a broader case for independent power generation.

In another example, the regulatory limit had to do with the national grid connection of a microgrid. In this context, the state permits microgrids at community level but does not have a framework for enabling their connection to the main grid, such that wheeling (i.e. feeding excess power back into the electricity grid) can occur. The developers, recognising the importance of wheeling for scaling their project, have thus implemented a single microgrid and are working with regulators to make the necessary changes to enable the full realisation of their project goals. This very important work of not only proving project viability but in tandem, driving regulatory change requires very capable and well-funded teams. This is often at odds with the realities of projects, which often have skilled leaders and managers but are not sufficiently resourced to focus on both operations and advocacy. Funding typically supports the operational aspects of project rollouts but the demand on developers to advance the more systemic changes required to enable scale is not incorporated into the funding package, placing added burden on project developers. Regulatory change is, therefore, often the product of the unpaid labour of developers who stretch and strain themselves to generate the public good that is an enabling regulatory environment.

Public-Private Partnership Is Essential

In tandem with the imperative for regulatory change is the pervasive place of the State. Of the 7 projects evaluated for this study, only one stood well outside the realm of the government. The 3 microgrid projects all had heavy state involvement, which, in one case, proved destructive. Microgrids, although highly effective for increasing energy access to remote and under-served communities, have the potential of being viewed as lesser forms of electricity. Typically, microgrids come with end-use limitations, enabling only the use of less energy intensive appliances such as fridges, lights and televisions, to the exclusion of stoves and kettles. Indeed, for those who have no electricity at all, this should be viewed as a positive step in the right direction. However, in one case, the government, having initially committed to supporting the large-scale rollout of privately-funded microgrids, reneged on its promise. To cover up a case of graft, in which the state had misused donor funding dedicated to the microgrid sector, key political leaders announced that they would be expanding the national grid, delivering 'real' electricity to the masses. This changed community attitudes towards microgrids and simultaneously signalled to funders that there was no longer an opportunity in the microgrid sector.

Another project, in the agriculture sector, requires the state to provide access to its land to enable broader community benefit. In conversations with state representatives, it was mentioned that land can be availed to them by terminating, without warning, the lease of an existing tenant. Whilst the state is willing to help, in discussing their current tenant as dispensable, it also signals that the security of tenure that is sought by the project, may not be possible in the long-run.

In another project, it was indicated that the state has inconsistent rules regarding the permitting process for projects. Although meant to fall under a single government department, projects face more stringent permitting and reporting requirements when registering solar installations in the Western Cape province of South Africa. These projects, exhibit traits of public-private partnership on a small scale, given that private actors invest in the greening of energy infrastructure of publicly owned assets. However, in some provinces the state's only interest is in registering the projects, with no further effort committed to monitoring the quality and impact of execution. In this context, the developers have chosen to apply the more stringent requirements of the Western Cape across all projects to ensure that they protect the projects from all risks.

These examples surface the importance of the state in Just Transition projects. The state creates the context, controls the rules and at times, key resources to enable projects. However, in the absence of consistency, commitment and predictability, it becomes difficult to construct a case for scale as that often requires all key variables to remain constant across locations. This is not to understate the problems that are at times generated by private projects but is rather a call to place partnership at the centre of the work that needs to be done. Indeed, in cases where public-private partnerships are strong, projects achieve greater long-term impacts.

Past Politics Are In The Present

Just Transition projects are not shielded from the broader political context. In fact, in some ways, they are more centrally located within those politics, because they represent a new and therefore more easily contestable source of value. In one example, a microgrid was developed for the community, at no cost to the households. However, once the project developers had left, a local leader changed the narrative of the project, requiring all households to pay a monthly fee to them. The community yielded, in part because of ignorance, but also because the leader represented an authority figure to whom various payments are always made. The introduction of a payment regime to a project that was pitched to funders as completely free for end-users, creates new risks, undermining the project developers, their stated intention as well as the impact of the project in cases where households must then be denied access where they no longer meet the new affordability threshold.

In another context, the targeted community participants became sceptical of the project when better-off members of the community were included. The intention of the project was to sell livestock, through loans, to existing farmers and from the interest earnings, livestock could be donated to the core participants. However, because the better-off farmers would be first to receive tangible benefit, the community began to question whether there would be ultimate benefit for them. The reason for their mistrust was rooted in a longer history of failed projects and unmet promises. To rectify this however is not as simple as issuing a clarification statement. The project leaders had to host community meetings to re-position the project. However, they realise that the work of earning genuine trust is ongoing and will require multiple proof-points before the community is truly convinced of the validity and shared value promised by the business model.

In yet another context, local leaders insist on playing a part in the installation of solar systems. They acknowledge that they lack the experience to make a meaningful contribution and thus have determined that they should be given a fee for managing the process of identifying capable parties. Asked why they believe this ought to be their role, they state that national regulations require 'local content' in project execution and thus their role, will make the project compliant. In reality, there is no specific regulation that requires such participation in the kind of project being developed. Instead, popular narratives are inserted in the hopes that they can provide the needed veneer of legality to what is otherwise a process of extortion and intimidation.

Having noted such requests in a different project, a European funder asked that the accounting trail of these payments be incorporated into a different line item to conceal the corruption. In a different context, the national government pulled all funding to a Just Transition project to compromise the political party leading the region in which the project was being implemented.

Navigating politics, particularly politics that predate a project, is an arduous and time-consuming task. Similar to advocating for regulatory change, this is another form of unpaid labour that goes into proving the viability of projects and smoothing the terrain for more predictable implementations, going forward. However, much unlike developing a large-scale project, where project development fees recognise the cost of assuming risk ahead of project certainty, small-scale projects do not enjoy the same benefits. This is exacerbated by their community development aspects which often, yet erroneously, signal a lower commercial appetite. The political work then, of developing small-scale projects goes unaccounted for, placing an unremunerated burden on project developers, who are forced to spread resources thin, in order to achieve their objectives.

Things Take Time/ The Urgency of the Just Transition Presents A Dilemma

A persisting challenge with developing community projects for scale, is time. In one case, it took 4 years to develop a microgrid project which only required 8 days to actually install. These long durations are driven by a variety of factors, from building relationships of trust to managing the complex logistics of remote communities. Indeed, overlaying the project-level dynamics are the macro forces such as regulatory change, changes in political incumbents, fiscal pressures and geopolitical dynamics. One project is anticipating added momentum following the next Congress Of The Parties meeting at the end of 2021 (COP 26). The time it takes for people to get work done, even when well-intentioned, is not necessarily aligned with the urgency that is required to meet the targets that underpin the Just Transition. Indeed, even the process of upskilling and reskilling, is extensive. There is thus a dilemma to be reckoned with when seeking to scale projects as the point at which scale may be achieved is not necessarily consistent with when it is needed, the need being sooner on the timescale.

The 'Feminisation' Of Small Scale Projects

In closing, we learn from actual project experience that a key limitation of small-scale projects exists in the aspects of the work that are unremunerated. Similar to how 'women's work' often goes unremunerated or under-remunerated, small-scale projects suffer an economic recognition problem that results in limited returns to effort. Much of the work of developing projects includes advocacy, protracted political negotiations, brokering new relationships and normalising new ways of generating value. This work exists outside the technical details of the artefacts and/ services that are generated through projects. By failing to properly remunerate this work, a context is created in which work is either done poorly or the parties involved are strained to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion. To address this, more robust funding mechanisms are required, defined by patience, endurance, transparency, and genuine proximity to the projects. Indeed, more funding must be availed for non-technical aspects of projects but this must also be coupled with more openness to the complexity of community projects, appreciating that the messiness of politics in small-scale projects is precisely what lays the ground for neater political engagement on larger-scale projects. There exists an epistemological boundary, as it were, in appreciating that that which is small is in fact that which clears the path for the possibilities of larger scale investments. This is especially true in the case of the microgrid case studies highlighted above. Similarly, South Africa's Renewable Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), the Darling Wind Farm, developed many years ahead of the programme's inception, provided crucial lessons for what would ultimately become a structured procurement programme[1]. Thus, just as project developers of large scale projects are able to weave in large fees for successful projects, so too should the implementors of smaller-scale projects that pave the way. In these contexts, the value generated may not be easily recouped from the community or client-base and must thus be understood as a necessary 'tax' for the work of path-making. By appreciating the true costs of small-scale projects, financiers can thus become more discerning, backing precisely the types of projects that are likely to be scalable, on the basis of a remuneration model that makes their pilots/proofs of concepts more robust.

FUNDING SMALL SCALE PROJECTS

To assess the financial aspects of funding small-scale projects, 3 interviews were conducted with parties who seek to fund Just Transition projects. The interviews focused largely on their experiences evaluating projects to fund but also on the experiences of raising capital to fund such projects. The one party funds projects though an outcomes-based model, paying its partners for identifying and funding projects that generate jobs in key sectors for the Just Transition, including water and power. The other party, an experienced financier of early-stage businesses, reflected on the limitations of being amongst very few entities that understand smaller scale endeavours. The final party, raising capital for Just Transition projects, was interviewed about the availability of the capital that is required to scale such projects.

There Are Not Enough Friends, Families & Fools

Funding for community Just Transition projects, which are more often than not, small-scale, emanates from an understanding that there exists a requirement for capital that is beyond personal means whilst not neatly calibrated to standard commercial funding, which, over time, has become biased to larger and larger projects. Consistently then, given the extent of unremunerated effort that goes into projects, developers of the kind interviewed in this

[1] https://www.dw.com/en/south-africa-lauches-its-first-wind-farm/a-2214534

study, find themselves without sufficient resources to fulfil all project requirements. Eventually, project leaders exhaust their own resources, both material resources as well the physical, mental and emotional resources that are required to take projects to their desired end. This is where the funding gap is most apparent.

It was thus repeatedly noted that projects require more comprehensive funding for their pilot phases, with more generous buffers for operational expenses and more organisational funding support to hire bigger teams, with a broader range of skills, including organisational management and stakeholder engagement. Particularly in the case of projects that seek to scale, it is important that they are seen as going concern organisations and not once-off initiatives. The once-off or project approach narrows the competency pool, over-emphasising technical and project management skills, where related skills such as marketing, human resource management and development practice are required. In the South African context, organisations facing these scale challenges are referred to as 'the missing middle', meaning that they have made the necessary investments to initiate their projects but have not reached a sufficient level of scale to justify commercial funding. In this zone, projects find themselves in a bind, typically unable to get further financial support from personal networks.

Herein lies an unrealised role for local development financiers (DFIs). DFIs, by virtue of having access to cheaper money, are well-placed to fund smaller-scale projects, inclusive of capacity development support to assist organisations to become investment-ready. Indeed, to the extent that local DFIs have limited access to concessional funding, a larger role is required from DFIs that are better placed for developmental funding. There is currently a large gap for this sort of funding and capacity development support in the market, with DFIs and commercial funders seemingly chasing the same large-scale investments, and fewer parties predominantly dedicated to the support of smaller scale projects. In 3 of the 4 South African cases, funding for project initiation was primarily received through corporate social investment programmes (CSI). There is thus an added case to be made for more targeted CSI, focused on Just Transition projects and importantly, aiding the research and development phases of such projects. However, much like government spend, CSI is also spread thin, often unable to provide comprehensive funding over the requisite duration, to support projects to maturation. In all, funding requires focus and endurance. The desire to address a wide range of problems faced by communities in tandem with the very specific demands of the Just Transition simultaneously often undermines all project efforts, simultaneously.

Raising Funding Is A Good Problem To Have

Indeed, whilst funding is often a headache for project developers, it was acknowledged that having to raise funding presented a positive constraint for projects. Understanding the requirements of funders and the simultaneous drive to become less and less dependent on them, was articulated as a positive force in projects. In one case, the pulling of grant funding motivated the project leaders to conduct an impact evaluation of their projects and on the basis of proven success, they were able to raise results-based financing through commercial channels. In a similar case, the limited capacity of grant funders has motivated the developers to create a commercial impact-fund, backed by the track record garnered through donor-funded projects. In a very different approach, the demands of funders for a particular articulation of impact resulted in a process of introspection for a project that shifted its understanding of its place and purpose. Rather than seeing itself as a project in a community, the organisation shifted to identifying as an institution within the community, committed to it, for life. This changed the time horizon for impact as well as the metrics and measures of good change. Thus the pressure from funders resulted in a positive rearticulation of organisational purpose, which then enabled more transparency and alignment with funders. It thus comes through that albeit a challenge, project developers appreciate the pressures that come with refining their work to meet the demands of funders, knowing that resolving these problems paves the path to scale.

However, all successful cases also depended on the willingness of funders to get close to the projects. It is important that there is an open and robust channel of communication and ideally, that funders visit project sites and meet community members. The desire to have untarnished brands and therefore, distance from communities who may hold funders accountable, generates added pressure on project developers to provide perfect solutions to imperfect contexts. There is thus a requirement for funders to develop the necessary depth of understanding of the projects and parties that they fund. One project leader summed up the success they'd achieved by saying that they had transitioned their relationships with communities and funders from *holding each other accountable* to *holding each other's hands*.

The quest for private capital to play a more active role in funding small-scale projects is, in some ways, reminiscent of Thabo Mbeki's critique of capital's role in society. It shines due light on the extractive nature of the first economy, which, albeit dependent on the masses for consuming its products and services, is unable to pivot its relationship towards long-term investment. The research continues to echo these challenges. One of the interviewees raising capital for Just Transition projects indicated that despite the need to deploy these investments, South African capital remains unable to pivot away from known investment approaches, particularly in listed markets. There seems also to be a desire for 'impact narratives', the telling of compelling stories about socio-economic impact has now become popular, appealing to how capital can solve Environment, Society and Governance challenges. Yet, asked whether capital is in fact deployed on this basis, all interviewees claimed not. Instead, the dominant logic is still one of profit-making, which, in the context of new types of projects, requires patience. That capital, operating in South Africa, a context with a very clear need for creativity in funding activities that sit outside the corporate mould, is still unable to solve for small-scale projects that serve the majority, indicates a deep problem of imagination. South African capital seems to mimic the logics of more mature economies, unable or unwilling to play a leadership role in crafting new instruments and approaches to the challenges of its actual context. In this sense, South Africa suffers a dilemma in its self-image, aspiring on the one hand to bridge its first and second economy challenge whilst simultaneously lacking the institutional commitment to generate precisely the instruments that are needed to breathe vibrancy into the economy. The Just Transition presents an opportunity for both private and developmental finance to elevate its thinking by creating instruments to serve the 'lower' end of the market.

PROPOSING A WAY FORWARD

Over and above the challenges observed in relation to community development, funding, project implementation and their complex and at times, competing logics, exist some key dilemmas worth reiterating.

The first dilemma of the Just Transition is time. It takes time for people to create new value. The time required to refine a project for scale is not necessarily consistent with the urgency of the transition to a net zero economy. For example, in one of the project contexts explored, it will take up to 5 years to deploy microgrids to 7500 households. This is in a context where the country currently sits at under 30% household electrification and is comprised of close to 10 million households. Whilst the work of electrifying 7500 households is significant, creating substantial employment in the construction and operations of the assets, it is still small relative to what is required, on the whole. That more organisations, more projects and more funding are simultaneously required, goes without saying. Whether all of this can occur within the required timeframes is doubtful.

The second dilemma is the ideal of community ownership. There is a requirement to rearticulate the meaning of good community development, such that those who seek to deliver benefit to communities are not pressured to distance themselves from projects before they reach maturity. By accepting the fundamental nature of some projects as community-placed and therefore, externally driven, a new understanding of development practice can emerge, less attached to the full transfer of projects and more focused on the principles of long-term sustainability, which often entails a degree of continued involvement for external parties.

Perhaps the most important lesson coming out of community projects for the Just Transition is that not all community projects have the same identity. There exists a very strong normative outlook in the community development literature, which defines 'good' projects as those which engender deep community participation, develop community capacity and ultimately result in community ownership. This ideal is often left unrealised when evaluating projects retrospectively. Indeed, as articulated in earlier sections, few projects that have sought complete handover to communities, can be deemed a success. It is thus worth grappling with where the problem lies- is it at the level of the norm or truly, in project execution?

What this study has established is that there exists a necessary distinction between community-based versus community-placed projects. Of the projects evaluated, all but one was originated by parties who can be deemed 'locals'. Outsider status implies not being of the particular community, even if of the same region or country. These projects thus face a considerable amount of pressure if required to not only achieve scale and impact, but to do so having transferred ownership to communities. As indicated in the literature, the process of ownership is best achieved when the project is itself the outcome of pre-existing struggle. The expectation, therefore, that participatory practices and capacity development can take the place of struggle is what potentially sets projects up for failure. Indeed, evidence evaluating real-world examples leans heavily towards the direction of failure, where externally generated projects are 'transferred' to communities. Where the literature is potentially biased is in locating the problem of unsustainable projects at the feet of the project implementors. It is often the case that project developers bear the brunt of imperfect development practice. It is almost assumed that projects were perhaps one community engagement short of being transferrable. This is to say the literature faults development practice, blind to the fact that the issue may very well be an unrealistic norm. Instead, it is the contention of this paper that the absence of internal struggle makes the possibility of long-term ownership, fundamentally, unlikely.

One of the project leads interviewed framed this slightly differently, saying that he thought of exit in the context of a franchise model. Rather than pursue a full exit, their organisation sought to transfer the bulk of the work and benefit to the local community, whilst retaining control and responsibility for the aspects of the project that are core to its impact-thesis and sustainability. In this way, if the initial community-to-developer ratio of work was 20:80, it shifts to the inverse, once the project is complete. By letting go of the expectation that the project should be fully handed over, the developer claimed that it became much easier to sustain it over the long run. Another developer stated that the expectation of project handover was inconsistent with the true time horizon required for capacity development. From their perspective, the work of developing capacity is not limited to technical skills. Instead, they are looking to the full ecosystem of social development to support a new generation of people who will receive quality education from early childhood, through to university. They are relying on key social services to be improved, such as healthcare. Without all these improvements there will not be a sufficient pool of people with the diversity of skills that are required to not only understand the technical aspects of the project but the science and commerce that supports its viability. In another context, the project requires the government utility to play a leading role in operating the microgrids once they have been fully developed. This is one of multiple permutations of state involvement but there is no version of long-term sustainability that leans solely on communities - a bigger and more capable entity is required to participate. More radically, one of the projects has completely abandoned the possibility of handover. Instead, by altering its identity from community-placed to community-based, it has shifted from being a project to a going concern, that, by virtue of being of the community, has no pressure to be transferred. These insights coming from project developers reflect the complex work of responding to the needs of communities over the long-run. In one project, it was determined that community ownership does not actually imply transferring the project. Instead, a system of paying for access to the microgrid engendered a sense of ownership, with community members seeking to protect their financial commitments by ensuring that the infrastructure was not compromised. In the first community where a payments system was implemented, it was the community who identified and disciplined a vandal, not because they owned the infrastructure but because they were making active financial sacrifices to access power, and thus assuming a level of risk, in order to sustain their access.

In essence, this paper, in articulating a path to scale, has argued that much work is required at the conceptual level. It is worth reconceptualising the ideals that underpin community development, project finance as well project implementation. At all these levels, there is clear dissonance between the norms established by both dominant actors such as the state as well as less powerful actors such as project implementors. On both ends, it is clear that the ideal of self-generated community value is often and unduly so strong that it competes with the lived experience of project execution.

Projects can deliver substantial value to communities without ultimately vesting in their hands. Indeed, when project originators maintain responsibility for the continued operations of projects, they continue to bring the capacity and historical knowledge that are crucial for project sustainability. This does not negate the requirement for projects to be participatory and for benefit to be shared. It does however remove the pressure to transfer projects, which can also provide an added layer of security for project financiers. Indeed, for scale to become viable, a reorientation of both project development and financing is required. Project developers, so often driven by passion, risk compromising their own projects by investing themselves beyond that which is defensible, because they buy into an ideal of self-sacrifice in service of the greater good. Project financiers require a new incentive system, rewarding originality and context-driven solutions rather than the mimicry of mature markets. Thankfully, the South African financial market is deep enough to produce such innovation. What the country needs now, quite simply, is a new conceptual framework, consistent with what we understand to be sustainable and just, for people and the planet.

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