

Aligning Just Transition in the UNFCCC Process with Real-World Action

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Workshop Outcomes

Introduction

This report summarizes the key insights and outcomes from the recent Just Transition (JT) workshop in Bonn, facilitated by Climate Strategies and LACLiMA, and delivered with the support of the COP30 Presidency and the International Climate Initiative (IKI) on behalf of the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWE).

The in-person event built on the outcomes of the previous workshop in the series, titled “Bridging the Gap: Shifting from Dialogue to Action on Just Transition” and held during Panama Climate Week in May 2025. The Bonn edition, which took place adjacent to the SB62 climate negotiations, brought together more than 70 policymakers, technical experts, and civil society representatives to explore how Just Transition processes at the global level can learn from and support local transitions. As the global community approaches COP30 in Belem, this workshop sought to foster dialogue between negotiators and on-the-ground actors, identify challenges in JT implementation, and highlight pathways for operationalizing JT principles at both national and international levels.

Session 1: Learning and Inspirations

Opening remarks

Ana Toni (CEO, COP30 Presidency) opened the event by acknowledging the importance of Just Transitions for the Brazilian COP presidency. She stressed that the development of clearer Just Transition strategies at the national level is fundamental to inform global conversations and negotiations on the topic. For this reason, Brazil is pioneering the development of a Just

Transition Taxonomy, a reference framework that can help build domestic consensus on the concept and help sharing unified messages on the international stage. She argued that waiting for complete conceptual clarity on Just Transitions might be counter-productive. Instead, countries should focus on the concrete, practical cases where JTs are already underway: for example, reskilling initiatives targeting new generations and clean cooking projects - tangible areas where progress can be made and scaled.

Importantly, Ana cautioned against allowing JT discussions to sideline or delay climate action, emphasizing that such tactics are unfair to vulnerable populations who rely on systemic social and climate transformation.

Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven (GIZ) underscored the vital need for spaces where negotiators and practitioners working on the ground can engage directly. While she recognized the current geopolitical tensions and conflicts that complicate international collaboration, she expressed optimism for peace and long-term climate action, noting that policies must be inclusive and participatory in order to succeed.

She further stressed that learning from both successes and setbacks across countries is essential to accelerating transitions. She urged participants to ensure that insights from this workshop directly connect with the texts discussed in the negotiation rooms, reiterating Germany's commitment to support the COP30 presidency in making Just Transitions operational.

Keynote Presentation

Ana Gonzalez Alonso (Climate Strategies) provided an overview of **key barriers to operationalise Just Transitions across Global South countries**. The insights she presented stem from academic research within the SouthToSouth Project, an initiative grounded in collaborative and participatory approaches.

- **Limited capacity:** countries might have limited technical expertise for impact assessments and data analysis, particularly in terms of the disaggregated data necessary for understanding trade-offs related to transitions. The high prevalence of informal workers in many sectors complicates efforts to manage impacts, as transitioning informal workers to formal employment may not align with community preferences. Additionally, the pool of local JT expertise remains small, limiting context-specific solutions.
- **Coordination challenges:** the misconception that JT is only relevant in the energy sector may result in fragmented and siloed actions. A lack of clear governance structures and weak mandates across ministries hinder the ability to coordinate cross-sectoral JT strategies effectively.
- **Financial barriers:** limited funding is available beyond the energy sector and insufficient resources are dedicated to ensuring that JT outcomes are socially, economically, and environmentally just.

- **Governance:** the interaction between local and global actors presents further difficulties, including ensuring the equitable sharing of JT benefits, clarifying existing resources at the international level, and developing clear monitoring and evaluation criteria.

Ana emphasised the vital role of the international community in bridging multilateral discussions with the realities on the ground, calling for stronger support to implement socio-economic justice within climate action.

Case Study

Ka Hyoun Moon (SFOC) shared a case study from the **Chungnam region in South Korea**, where a **Just Transition Fund** was recently established. The country aims to phase out coal by 2040, a goal that has gained public support in part due to South Korea's serious air pollution problem. In 2017, recognizing the health and climate impacts linked to coal, and building on the momentum of the Paris Agreement, the country launched a committee bringing together local governments to address these interconnected challenges.

Recognizing that around 22,000 workers depend on the coal sector, the government set up a Just Transition Fund to mitigate the impacts of the phase-out. The fund aims to raise €6.34 million from central and local governments as well as three power companies, with €4.76 million secured so far. Its objective is to support employment succession, retraining, career transition programs, corporate relocation incentives, small business assistance, community welfare projects, and the dismantling and site restoration of coal plants.

Ka Hyoun acknowledged some key challenges in the operationalisation of the fund, including fluctuating political will, administrative changes that risk interrupting progress, and knowledge gaps regarding JT implementation. At the same time, meaningful opportunities have emerged, driven by extensive stakeholder engagement. Advocacy efforts, showing the co-benefit of a Just Transition to members of the National Assembly, helped make climate one of the key issues shaping the public debate during the most recent elections. International recognition for JT has proven to be a powerful leverage to motivate national and local politicians, who see action in this area as a way to strengthen their leadership position in the Asian climate policy landscape.

Ka Hyoun emphasized the importance of empowering local leaders to advance JT initiatives, promoting peer learning, and framing JT as a political priority to sustain momentum despite challenges.

International perspective

Anabella Rosemberg (CAN) introduced a series of concrete outcomes for the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) that have been proposed by Parties and Observer organisations.

She presented the topic within the context of JT's growing visibility and recognition as a critical enabler of prosperous, inclusive climate pathways, both globally and nationally. The

establishment of the JTWP at COP27 marked a significant step, and COP30 in Brazil represents a crucial milestone for advancing its agenda. While acknowledging the limitations of multilateralism, she stressed its indispensable role in legitimizing and coordinating JT efforts worldwide.

She described a recent informal convening by CAN and the Stanley Center in Panama, designed to provide a space for honest conversations among key JT stakeholders to shape COP30 outcomes. She summarised five key proposals emerging from the debate:

- **Adoption of Just Transition principles** rooted in equity, inclusion, and rights-based approaches, building on existing frameworks like those from the ILO. While largely seen as a foundational step, some concerns were raised about negotiation complexity and the potential reporting burden on countries.
- **Establishment of a Global JT Mechanism** to coordinate actions, provide tools and knowledge, and foster inclusive governance. While widely supported by civil society, opinions varied on whether improvements to existing mechanisms might be a preferable approach.
- **Making JT eligible for climate finance**, enabling funding for social protection, skills development, economic diversification, and ecosystem restoration. The main concern in this sense is that this could further strain limited climate finance.
- **Integration of JT into national climate plans** such as NDCs, NAPs, and long-term strategies, with support for guidance, finance, and capacity building to operationalize this integration.
- **Enhancement of national participation mechanisms** to ensure inclusive, local-level planning and comprehensive stakeholder engagement, balancing flexibility with accountability.

Anabella concluded by noting these proposals are mutually reinforcing and that COP30 offers a unique chance to realign climate action narratives to put people and justice at the core.

Session 2: Mutirão and small group discussions

Participants were divided into 6 groups and invited to reflect on the presentations, share country experiences, and engage in critical dialogue about strengthening the connection between JTs on the ground and international frameworks. Stakeholders engaged with the following guiding questions:

1. *Aligning the narrative in the UNFCCC with on-the-ground needs:* How can local Just Transition efforts inform the development of global approaches, that in turn can enable more effective implementation on JT on the ground?

2. *Global System*: What type of approach in the UNFCCC could help connect global Just Transition discussions to local needs, while avoiding fragmented or siloed efforts between different organizations at the international level?
3. *Knowledge gaps*: From your experience on the ground and the discussions happening at the international level within the JTWP, what knowledge is most needed to help advance ambitious Just Transition implementation? Where are the most critical information gaps to create, assess and implement JT policies?

What follows is a synthesis of key themes, challenges, and opportunities that emerged across the discussions.

Consolidated priorities

The moment to act is now

A recurrent theme across all groups was the urgency to act, despite the political, conceptual, and operational complexities that surround JT. In particular, COP30 offers a unique window to advance JT at the global level. Many participants cautioned against allowing ongoing definitional debates or geopolitical tensions to delay tangible progress. Instead, they advocated for focusing on concrete actions and case studies that demonstrate what JT means in practice. There was a shared sense that showcasing successful pilots, even if small-scale or imperfect, could build political will and provide proof of concept to inspire broader adoption.

Global-local coordination

Participants widely endorsed proposals for structured feedback mechanisms—such as helpdesks, advisory boards, and national contact points—to ensure local realities inform global discussions. A recurring idea was a “match-making platform” to connect local needs with existing global initiatives. However, some participants warned against a possible duplication of efforts and suggested integrating JT with existing structures, including ILO and MDBs, with a particular emphasis on National Plans.

National ownership and leadership were seen as essential pillars for success by all stakeholders. Several participants highlighted that Just Transition cannot be imposed externally; it must be rooted in national development priorities and reflect the realities and aspirations of affected communities. This requires strong political champions, both at the national and subnational levels, who can articulate the JT vision and drive coherent action across government and society. Participants highlighted the value of international platforms in showcasing national and local leadership, fostering peer learning, and building coalitions for JT. They called for more structured opportunities for exchange, particularly among countries and regions facing similar challenges.

Conceptual clarity and principles

Rather than a single JT definition, participants stressed agreement on shared principles—equity, inclusion, rights-based approaches, participation, and accountability. ILO guidelines were often cited as a foundation, with emphasis on building flexible, context-sensitive frameworks that can apply across sectors and countries.

Inclusion of informal sectors, Indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups

The need to actively involve informal workers, Indigenous communities, and vulnerable groups came up repeatedly. Genuine inclusion requires not just consultation, but mechanisms for shared decision-making and benefit-sharing. Examples included concerns about over-representation of fossil fuel industry voices and the exclusion of those historically harmed by energy systems. Participants highlighted the risk of reproducing past injustices in new JT efforts if inclusivity is not prioritized.

Finance and capacity building

Finance was seen as both a barrier and an opportunity. Participants advocated for making JT components (social protection, training, ecosystem restoration) eligible for climate finance. Some described how JT is often seen as relevant only to energy or coal transitions, leaving out critical sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and manufacturing. Capacity building programmes should be tailored to local realities – expanding technical training to include community-relevant, accessible information, as well as traditional and Indigenous knowledge. Case studies, such as South Korea’s JT Fund and Spain’s coal phase-out, were cited as examples of linking finance to local transition needs.

Narrative shift

Participants strongly supported framing JT as a positive, development-linked opportunity. They proposed using storytelling to connect climate action with co-benefits like job creation, health improvements, and social cohesion. There was agreement that reframing JT as part of national development agendas could help secure broader political and public support, and unlock new sources of finance. Some participants expressed concern that JT discussions could be used, intentionally or not, as a tactic to stall or water down broader climate ambition. They stressed the need to position JT as an enabler, rather than an obstacle, for accelerated climate action.

Closing remarks

Jonathan Krull (German Ministry of Foreign Affairs) closed the event, highlighting the value of the dialogue in bringing together diverse voices to chart practical pathways for Just Transition. He mentioned that the workshop’s discussions showcased both the complexity and promise of aligning local realities with global frameworks, and the importance of continued learning, honest reflection, and cooperation across levels. He encouraged participants to carry these insights forward into upcoming negotiations and actions, underscoring that JTs must be shaped by those most affected and driven by collective responsibility.

Synthesis: Comprehensive lessons learnt from the past two stakeholder engagements on Just Transitions

- Global frameworks should provide structure and recognition for local action, enabling political momentum, peer learning, and resource alignment.
- Feedback loops are essential: bottom-up experiences must inform global dialogues, and global processes must support local implementation through tools, coordination spaces, and participatory mechanisms.
- JT should not become a barrier to ambition; the process must accelerate fair climate action and avoid becoming a reason for delay.
- There is an ongoing debate between the possibility of building on and linking existing JT structures to avoid fragmentation and duplication, or creating entirely new global coordination spaces to fill gaps and ensure alignment with local needs.
- Local and regional governments are taking the lead, showing that bottom-up initiatives can shape national policy and drive innovation. It is fundamental to support these local efforts through capacity-building and direct access to funding.
- Storytelling and positive narratives can help overcome political resistance, communicate co-benefits, and unlock new finance sources. Mainstreaming JTs in every aspect of policymaking is a winning strategy to build broader public consensus.
- Inclusive governance and participation mechanisms are critical to ensure the voices of informal workers, Indigenous peoples, and vulnerable groups are central to JT design and delivery.
- Finance and capacity support must accompany integration of JT into national plans, ensuring that social, economic, and environmental objectives are achieved together.
- Learning from both successes and failures can guide more adaptive and context-relevant JT strategies globally.
- Progress on JT will necessarily be incremental and context-specific. It is important to start with what is feasible — even small steps — while building towards more comprehensive, transformative approaches over time.