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# **Landscapes of (In)justice: Reflecting on Voices, Spaces, and Alliances for Just Transition**

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**Peter Newell, Roz Price and Freddie Daley  
September 2023**

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## **Summary**

Just transitions seek to ameliorate the social and economic impacts of the global energy transitions that are essential to building an equitable low-carbon economy in the coming decades. Diverse groups of citizens need to be engaged in the design and implementation of transition policies across all scales and sectors for them to succeed and be socially acceptable. But how? And what lessons can we take from emerging practice to guide future action? This paper identifies insights from these experiences and struggles as they might pertain to contemporary attempts to ensure transitions are more socially just by drawing on a broad body of work on: (i) just transitions, energy justice, and energy transitions; (ii) contentious resource politics and attempts to democratise them; and (iii) social movement struggles for justice in the settings on which our project focuses. We focus on issues of voice (representation), spaces (for participation), and alliances (for change), paying particular attention to the three countries at the centre of this work: Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria.

## **Keywords**

Participation; voice; spaces; alliances; democracy; just transitions; energy; climate change.

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## Summary

Just transitions that seek to ameliorate the social and economic impacts of the global energy transitions require the engagement of diverse groups of citizens in the design and implementation of transition policies across all scales and sectors for them to succeed and be socially acceptable. But how?

Though the combinations, scale, and intensity of justice challenges associated with deepening and accelerating energy transitions to address the climate crisis appear to be unprecedented, issues of mobilisation and alliance-building, participation and inclusion in decision-making across scales on issues of energy and resource use are clearly not new. Hence the key question addressed by this paper is what can be learned from emergent practice around contestations over just transitions and relevant examples of previous experience of citizen attempts to centre justice issues in resource politics? Are there key insights that might inform contemporary efforts to ensure that energy transitions are just transitions?

To identify insights from these experiences and struggles, we explore a broad body of work on: (i) just transitions, energy justice, and energy transitions; (ii) contentious resource politics and attempts to democratise them; and (iii) social movement struggles for justice in the settings on which our project focuses. We focus on issues of voice (representation), spaces (for participation), and alliances (for change), paying particular attention to the three countries at the centre of this work – Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria – while not restricting ourselves to them, given that many of these issues transcend those settings.

We provide an overview of the key challenges and emergent practice from around the world about how citizens are engaging with issues of just transition. From protest and mobilisation to participation in policy and the creation of new spaces of citizen engagement through climate assemblies, just transition partnerships and the like, diverse actors are grappling with the challenge of how best to engage citizens in building just transitions. The scale and depth of transformation required to create a low-carbon economy in just a few decades is not simply restricted to traditional spaces of climate and energy policy but applies equally to decision-making arenas within and beyond the state that relate to the everyday drivers of climate change around trade, transport, investment, and agriculture. This presents a particular challenge for citizen engagement insofar as many of these policy areas are traditionally often closed to citizen participation. Perhaps most challenging is the scalar and spatial disconnect between the nature of the drivers of energy transition (often private investment and technological innovation with key roles also for donors and multilateral organisations) and the spaces within which justice claims are most often articulated, mediated, and enforced (at the national level by public actors).

Bridging this gap presents a major political challenge for affected groups and activists seeking to bring justice issues into the everyday politics of just transitions across sites and scales.

Narrow conceptions of what constitutes a just transition are unhelpful in stimulating successful citizen engagement across varied contexts. Dominant approaches are often reduced to creating 'green jobs' and addressing issues of compensation and retraining without confronting broader issues of economic injustice or the inequalities which give rise to 'unjust transitions'. Yet given that different areas of policy will have disparate spaces, levers, and intervention points for facilitating citizen engagement, it is vital that broader and more integrated conceptions of just transitions are considered, reflective of the multiple historical and contemporary injustices they are seeking to reckon with.

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## Acronyms

A4EA	Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research programme
ACT	Africana critical theory
AfDB	African Development Bank
ADB	Asian Development Bank
APR	Aktionsprogramm Ruhr (Ruhr Action Programme)
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia)
BECC	Border Environmental Cooperation Commission
BP	British Petroleum
CA	Citizen Assembly
CCA	Climate Change Act [Nigeria]
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	civil society organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EACJ	East African Court of Justice
EACOP	East African Crude Oil Pipeline
EDF	Environmental Defense Fund
EIB	European Investment Bank
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EMCA	Environmental Management and Coordination Act [Kenya]
E4P	Energy for Peace
ERA	Environmental Rights Action
EU	European Union
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
FEF	Frontier Exploration Fund [Nigeria]
FOE	Friends of the Earth Nigeria
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GDP	gross domestic product
GHG	greenhouse gas
GVSt	German Coal Association
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEA	International Energy Agency
IG BCE	IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (German Trade Union for mining, chemical and energy industries)
IIRSA	Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund

IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
JASS	Just Associates
JETA	Just Energy Transition Africa
JETP	Just Energy Transition Partnership
JPAC	Joint Public Advisory Committee
JTA	Just Transition Alliance
LNG	liquified natural gas
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
MDBs	multilateral development banks
MNCs	multinational corporations
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NACEC	North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NETP	National Energy Transition Plan [Nigeria]
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NLC	Nigeria Labour Congress
NRGI	Natural Resource Governance Institute
OCI	Oil Change International
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIA	Petroleum Industry Act [Nigeria]
PMCA	Participatory Multi-Criteria Analysis
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
PWYP	Publish What You Pay
REEEP	Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership
REN21	Renewable Energy Network
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLO	social licence to operate
S4C	Spaces for Change (Nigerian NGO)
UK	United Kingdom
UKEF	UK Export Finance
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGP	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
US	United States

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Rationale

Transitioning to a low-carbon global economy will inevitably create winners and losers. Economic transformations have always been thus and the ‘transformative systemic change’ the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) now says will be required to tackle climate change will be no different (IPCC 2018). The notion of a ‘just transition’ builds on a recognition of the inescapable trade-offs (between social, environmental, and economic goals) and inequities around meeting the needs and priorities of disparate social groups in processes of environmental, social, and economic transition (Swilling and Anneck 2012; Newell and Mulvaney 2013; Morena, Krause and Stevis 2019). In particular, just transitions seek to ameliorate the social and economic impacts of the global energy transitions that are essential to building an equitable low-carbon economy in the coming decades. Diverse groups of citizens need to be engaged in the design and implementation of transition policies across all scales and sectors for them to succeed and be socially acceptable. But how? And what lessons can we take from emerging practice to guide future action?

Here we provide an overview of the key challenges and emergent practice from around the world about how citizens are engaging with issues of just transition. From protest and mobilisation to participation in policy and the creation of new spaces of citizen engagement through climate assemblies, just transition partnerships and the like, diverse actors are grappling with the challenge of how best to engage citizens in building just transitions. The scale and depth of transformation required to create a low-carbon economy in just a few decades is not simply restricted to traditional spaces of climate and energy policy but applies equally to decision-making arenas within and beyond the state that relate to the everyday drivers of climate change around trade, transport, investment, and agriculture. This presents a particular challenge for citizen engagement insofar as many of these policy areas are traditionally often closed to citizen participation. Perhaps most challenging is the scalar and spatial disconnect between the nature of the drivers of energy transition (often private investment and technological innovation with key roles also for donors and multilateral organisations) and the spaces within which justice claims are most often articulated, mediated, and enforced (at the national level by public actors). Bridging this gap presents a major political challenge for affected groups and activists seeking to bring justice issues into the everyday politics of just transitions across sites and scales. Bridging this gap, we suggest in the paper, might be achieved by allyship and alliance-building across divides and polarities between the winners and losers from different transition pathways, working with

intermediaries and adopting discourses and framings that resonate with the 'missing middle'. This refers to groups that are neither the drivers of transitions nor its main beneficiaries or victims, but whose support could be politically significant if thrown behind calls for greater procedural and distributive justice. A relevant example might be the huge effort made by activists in Ecuador to move the issue of oil exploration in the Yasuni national reserve from a peripheral activist concern to the subject of a national referendum by mobilising a vast petition and overcoming legal barriers to create space for a national debate on the country's energy future.

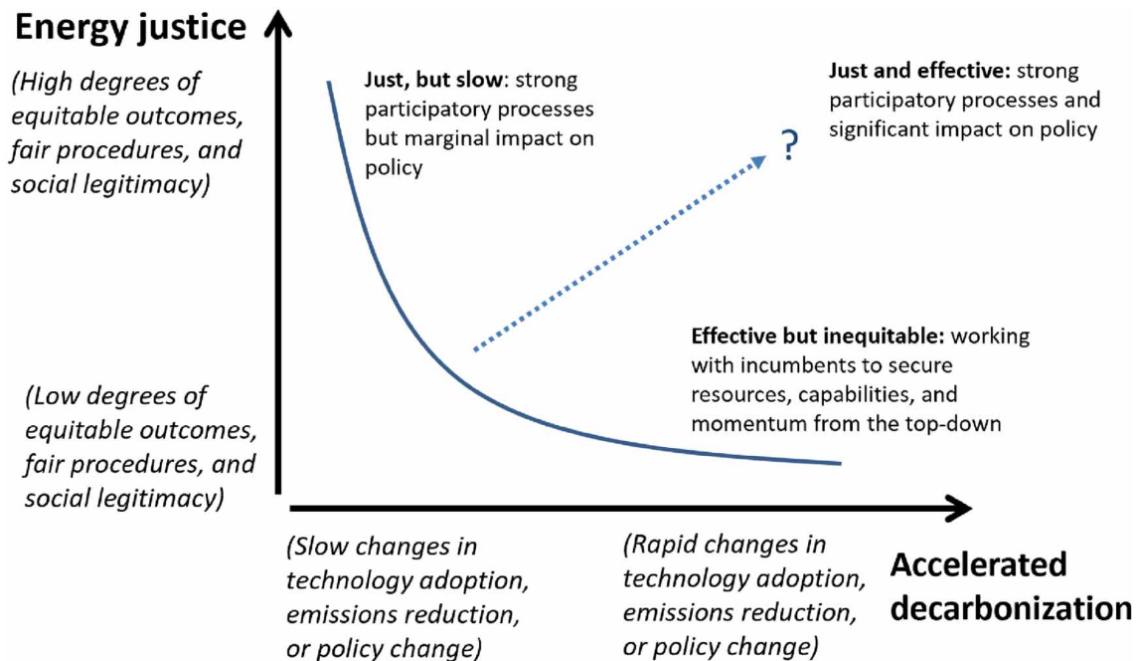
Despite the prescriptions and normative preferences of key actors such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or World Bank, narrow conceptions of what constitutes a just transition are unhelpful in stimulating successful citizen engagement across varied contexts. As discussed below (in section 1.3), dominant approaches are often reduced to creating 'green jobs' and addressing issues of compensation and retraining without confronting broader issues of economic injustice or the inequalities which give rise to 'unjust transitions' (Newell *et al.* 2023). Yet given that different areas of policy will have disparate spaces, levers, and intervention points for facilitating citizen engagement, it is vital that broader and more integrated conceptions of just transitions are considered, reflective of the multiple historical and contemporary injustices they are seeking to reckon with.

We are cognisant that many unrealistic expectations and idealised notions of what a just transition can and should look like circulate in policy and activist debates. It is sometimes claimed that just transitions should leave no one behind, involve the participation of all stakeholders (including those not yet born), address a whole series of regional and historical inequities and injustices while creating a new round of growth even more prosperous than the last. There are very few (if any) historical transitions which have met, or even attempted to satisfy, this range of criteria. Yet these are the demands imposed on transitions now underway to tackle the climate crisis, which will inevitably collapse under the weight of these expectations. Some transitions might be 'just enough', if not just in absolute terms or to the satisfaction of all groups. They might be just along some axes and dimensions but not others, reflecting difficult trade-offs around inclusion and rapid and effective action and paying more attention to some social and economic inequities and regional needs than others (see Figure 1.1 below) (Newell, Geels and Sovacool 2022). Indeed, it is often easier to say what injustice looks like than to say definitively what justice looks like. For many affected groups, it is relative and not absolute justice that counts: what they gain or lose relative to others. It is often the unevenness of treatment and protection and access to wealth generated from energy resources that fuels resentment and a sense of injustice. In other words, it is the perceptions of fairness within

and between social groups and societies which drive the politics of just transitions.

This underscores the need to pay attention to vernacular understandings of just transitions and the reality of everyday negotiations over energy pathways and to take philosophical and academic templates and categorisations or donor models as frameworks of analysis, rather than guides to what is happening on the ground. In many ways, it is in the gap between the academic and policy treatment of just transitions and the lived reality of essentially contested transitions where this paper seeks to contribute.

## Figure 1.1 Squaring speed and equity



Source: Newell, Geels and Sovacool (2022), [CC BY 4.0](#).

This means engaging with the messy reality of existing transitions and forms the terrain most groups have to engage on. It also highlights the politics of delay and incumbent strategies to slow the pace of transition until all these dimensions have been adequately attended to (by which time other injustices associated with runaway climate change will be created) in the knowledge that they probably never will be. Many major energy companies have never held themselves to account (nor been held to account by others) when transitioning between products, regions and sectors, routinely leaving disruption and social and environmental impacts in their wake. This highlights the importance of being alert to the politics of framing in just transition debates.

Though the combinations, scale, and intensity of justice challenges associated with deepening and accelerating energy transitions to address the climate crisis appear to be unprecedented, issues of mobilisation and alliance-building, participation and inclusion in decision-making across scales on issues of energy and resource use more broadly are clearly not new. Indeed, the contentious politics of resource governance around who gets to exploit what, how, and on whose behalf is at the heart of most development politics. Hence the key question addressed by this paper is: **what can be learned from emergent practice around contestations over just transitions and relevant examples of previous experience of citizen attempts to centre justice issues in resource politics?** Are there key insights that might inform contemporary efforts to ensure that energy transitions are just transitions?

In order to identify insights from these experiences and struggles as they might pertain to contemporary attempts to ensure transitions are more socially just, here we explore a broad body of work on: (i) **just transitions, energy justice, and energy transitions**; (ii) **contentious resource politics** and attempts to democratise them; and (iii) **social movement struggles for justice** in the settings on which our project focuses. We focus, in particular, on issues of voice (representation), spaces (for participation), and alliances (for change), paying particular attention to the three countries at the centre of this work – Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria – while not restricting ourselves to these cases, given that many of these issues transcend those settings.

## 1.2 Why Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria?

This paper seeks to draw on the experience of resource struggles in general and energy politics in particular from around the world, including both contemporary and historical examples. But it is also intended to help frame and inform work on lesson learning and exchange from three countries in particular: Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria. Why choose these three very different contexts to explore these issues?

A combination of factors makes these countries interesting sites to explore questions of just transition. These factors include:

1. The energy profile of these countries – high levels of dependence on fossil fuels but with feasible alternative energy pathways;
2. Their status as countries that have been through a process of internal conflict, which is still ongoing in the cases of widespread violence in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, insurgencies led by Boko Haram in Nigeria, and ongoing conflict between dissident guerrilla groups and the state in Colombia; and
3. Where democratic space, central to open discussion and exploration of transition pathways, just or otherwise, is challenged in different ways.



All three countries have faced challenges of civil conflict at different times and along distinct lines, as well as challenges to democratic modes of governing. Mozambique's ruling party has shifted in a strongly authoritarian direction over the decade since the country was rocked by large-scale fuel price protests, and the intersection of the Covid-19 pandemic and a growing insurgency in Cabo Delgado has seen a further closing of civic space and a rapid increase in human rights violations. Nigeria had appeared to be consolidating the process of democratic opening that had been underway since the end of the military regime, but in recent years this has gone into reverse, with repression of civil society protests against corruption and police violence and targeted attacks on outspoken activists. These general trends mask considerable subnational variation, as conditions for citizen voice and civil society activism in each country's oil and gas-producing regions are often very different from elsewhere in the country. Their different levels of political decentralisation – with Nigeria having a fully federal Constitution and Mozambique concentrating ever more power in the hands of the Maputo-based party–state machinery – also afford different opportunities for citizens and civil society groups from oil and gas-producing regions who wish to engage with energy policy debates. In both countries, local experiences of fossil-fuel extraction are driving high levels of dissatisfaction with social and environmental damage and with the concentration of economic benefits and political power in the hands of remote national elites – a dissatisfaction that in some cases has led to growing support for violent insurgencies. Colombia, meanwhile, has its own painful history of civil conflict and drug wars and a fragile peace accord in place which forms an important backdrop of discussions over control over resources and revenue from the energy sector.

Although all three countries are reliant (albeit to different degrees) on fossil fuels, making debates about just transitions — how and for whom these are organised — especially pertinent, each country is also at a critical juncture with respect to their energy futures. Colombia presents a fascinating case of a country undergoing a transition away from coal and with a new government under ex-rebel leader and now President Gustavo Petro advocating to leave reserves of oil, upon which Colombia has traditionally depended for much of its wealth, in the ground. Analysing the live politics of contestation around energy pathways in Colombia and their justice implications as they unfold provides critical insights into this fast-moving terrain. Within Nigeria, elements of civil society have been trying to engage citizens in reimagining their future (through the 'Which way Nigeria?' process described in section 3.2) and the place of oil within what has traditionally been a petro-infused imagination. Mozambique has vast gas reserves that are being touted as the basis of a new resource boom, one that is even more attractive to external investors and states in the wake of the war in Ukraine and the search among European states for new gas

exporters. Yet, bitter experience of previous promises of resource wealth and fear of being left with stranded assets fuel oppositional voices within and beyond Mozambique. These dynamics bring in transnational justice dimensions since short-term impacts are localised (in pollution, land dispossession, and conflict), the resources often exported (through pipelines to North Africa and then on to Europe), and the climate impacts globally produced but unevenly felt by social groups in different regions.

As with most countries, deep tensions and contradictions lie at the heart of their attempts to meet rising demand for energy, to compete globally, and to decarbonise their economies.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Nigeria, for example, in 2021, President Muhammadu Buhari announced the country's commitment to achieving net-zero by 2060, having ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017. This commitment is contained in two major frameworks: the National Energy Transition Plan (NETP) and the Climate Change Act (CCA) signed into law in November 2021. The NETP proposes a gas-based energy transition until 2040, which would enable Nigeria to launch the long-term renewable energy infrastructure procurements and investments needed to have a sustainable energy supply. The CCA, meanwhile, represents the legal framework for facilitating the mobilisation of finance and other resources necessary to ensure effective action on climate change and for mainstreaming climate change actions in line with national development priorities. In an oil-dependent nation ranked as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impacts of climate change, these legislative trends have been hailed as positive developments that will prepare Nigeria for a low-carbon future. However, recent laws contradict these carbon reduction ambitions, including the 2021 Petroleum Industry Act (PIA). The PIA, which creates a comprehensive oil and gas legal regime, brings into question the government's commitment to a just energy transition. In particular, the PIA provides for a Frontier Exploration Fund (FEF) to be derived from the national oil company's profit from oil and gas and used to fund exploration and development of oil and gas in the country's frontier basins. Yet, fears that Nigeria will be left with stranded assets are real. Mercure *et al.* (2021) find that if net-zero goals are to be achieved by 2050, over US\$350bn in African oil and gas assets would be stranded, with over US\$90.3bn in stranded assets in Nigeria alone.

With regard to Mozambique, for the past 20 years the Government of Mozambique has been actively courting foreign investment as an essential ingredient for efforts to turn the country's vast fossil fuel reserves into a revenue stream capable of funding the development needs of one of Africa's poorest populations. A key challenge is how to square this with the goals of the Paris

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1 The descriptions of Mozambique and Nigeria in these two paragraphs draw on our earlier unpublished paper (Newell *et al.* 2021).

Agreement, which Mozambique ratified in 2018. Mozambique and Tanzania alone accounted for 24 per cent of global discoveries of new gas between 2011 and 2018 (IEA 2019). The Tete coalfields and the gas fields of Cabo Delgado make up key reserves in Mozambique. The gas fields, in particular, are the focus of Africa's largest current energy investment, the Total Energies liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility on the Afungi Peninsula. Cabo Delgado is also the focus of one of Africa's most violent conflicts, a confrontation between jihadi rebels and Mozambican, Rwandan, and Southern African military forces that has so far driven over 700,000 people from their homes, as well as leading Total to suspend work on its Mozambique LNG project. At the same time, fewer than 30 per cent of Mozambicans currently have access to electricity, despite the country being a major exporter of hydroelectric power, explaining scepticism about whether new investments will do anything to improve energy access for the poorest. Mozambique has been pursuing an entirely export-oriented strategy that runs counter to the country's own Natural Gas Master Plan, adopted in 2014 as a strategic and multisectoral approach to leveraging gas to generate socio-economically and environmentally sustainable development at the national and local levels. Mozambique has declining production in its Pande and Temane fields and may need increased domestic power if the projects in the Rovuma Basin end up primarily as LNG projects and gas from the projects is not used for domestic power generation.

In Colombia, meanwhile, the government has charted a new direction for energy policy, one that has acted as a lightning rod for different interests within and outside Colombia. In 2020, Colombia joined 70 other countries to announce revised national targets aimed at reducing emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement goal to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. Colombia's ambitious pledge aims to reduce its emissions by 51 per cent compared to projected emissions in 2030 and reduce black carbon or soot emissions by 40 per cent compared to 2014. The target is consistent with the Paris Agreement's goal and has put Colombia on a more promising path to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Indeed, United States (US) Special Envoy John Kerry called Colombia a 'leader on climate action' in recognition of this enhanced ambition.<sup>2</sup> Although Colombia is an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member and has been adept at securing scarce international financial support, there is still a considerable gap in its funding needs to tackle the climate crisis. As Guy Edwards and Matías Franchini note,

While the new target... follows recent progress on promoting renewable energy and electric mobility, in addition to Colombia's proactive international stance, the broader economic and political

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<sup>2</sup> [Presidente Duque y John Kerry hablaron sobre protección del medio ambiente](#), Radio Caracol.

situation shows how difficult realizing these ambitious targets will be without a more holistic approach across governmental bodies and the active participation of the private sector.

(Edwards and Franchini 2021: para. 8)

They further reflect, 'For an ambitious goal to be realized, the support of political elites, business, and civil society will be critical' (*ibid.*: para. 21). The current President, elected in 2022 at the head of Colombia's first left-wing government, was even more ambitious. Petro promised a rapid energy transition through a range of measures including stopping oil exploration and banning fracking. Yet, as commentators have observed, 'By 2023 it is clear that his vision is too contentious and too threatening to economic stability, and that compromises and reversals are certain' (Colombia Risk Analysis 2022).

Alternative energy pathways exist, but they are currently under-supported and fossil fuel interests will not roll over lightly whatever the stated intentions of the new government. Colombia is also one of largest exporters of hard coal in the world and coal accounts for 1–2 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) (Mohr 2021). About 90 per cent of Colombian coal is extracted from the remote northern regions of La Guajira and Cesar (Strambo *et al.* 2018), which are characterised by ethnic diversity and high levels of poverty. Both regions also have large potentials for the development of renewable energies and the associated need for new transmission infrastructure (Mohr 2021; Vega-Araújo and Heffron 2022). Solar and wind currently account for only 0.2 per cent of the total capacity in Colombia compared with 18 per cent in Chile. In addition, as Edwards and Franchini note,

While Colombia is set to have strong growth in the wind and solar sectors in the coming years, and hydropower continues to provide the majority of the country's electricity, around 30 per cent of total installed capacity for power generation still comes from fossil fuels. The importance of the energy and mining sector for Colombia's economy is considerable, representing 12 per cent of national earnings and 56 per cent of all exports.

(Edwards and Franchini 2021: para. 15)

The previous (2018–22) government was keen to simultaneously advance fracking, develop fossil fuel projects, and stimulate renewable energy projects to reverse dwindling oil and gas production and spur economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Petro government is currently divided on whether it can see through its commitment to leave all fossil fuels in the ground. As with Nigeria and Mozambique, this potentially heightens the risk that fossil fuel assets will be retired early or become stranded before the end of their use as the world shifts away from carbon-intensive energy. As Edwards and Franchini (2021: para. 16) suggest, 'This could become costly; meeting the Paris Agreement goals could

result in US\$90bn of stranded fossil fuel assets in Latin America's power sector alone'.

### 1.3 What are just transitions?

There are a range of definitions and dimensions of a just transition. At its core it reflects the notion that the transitions in systems of energy, food, transportation and so on now required to meet a range of sustainability challenges (most often climate change) need to both take account of the losers from transitions, especially but not exclusively workers in carbon-intensive sectors, and be cognisant of the need to create new opportunities in the greener and lower-carbon economies built to replace them. Originating from the US' labour environmentalism of the 1970s and 1980s, the concept of 'Just Transition' has now gained support from diverse national and global labour unions and environmental justice groups (Bainton *et al.* 2021). This includes its adoption by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and backing from the ILO. Until the 2008 recession, just transition was promoted as part of unions' labour strategies to balance 'just and green transitions' (Stavis and Felli 2020: 2). However, after the economic downturn, just transition became a secondary component of proposals promoting green transitions based on innovation-led growth and green capitalism (Stavis and Felli 2020). The various Green New Deal proposals tabled post-2008 were reflective of this shift, placing greater emphasis on green growth and green jobs, instead of fully addressing just transition concerns around socioeconomic and geographical equity and labour rights alongside environmental concerns.

The politics of environmental and climate justice have a longer history, however, informed by the experience of the civil rights movement (Bullard 2000; Galvin 2020) and contestations of environmental racism, and indigenous resistance to extractivism going back centuries (Gilio-Whitaker 2019). They provide essential background to contemporary manifestations and preoccupations with uneven exposure to the harms of industrial development and uneven protection from its effects and deep inequities in the production of that harm. Insofar as environmental justice describes an environmentalism of the poor (Martínez-Alier 2002), contesting risk allocation and the distribution of gains from resource exploitation, making linkages to other social justice movements and profiling race and class concerns in the politics of struggle, there are many examples that could be described by the term (Sikor and Newell 2014). This is particularly the case for movements protesting the abuse of indigenous peoples' rights. Indigenous peoples and *campesino* groups are frequently at the forefront of contesting land claims of economic producers, often inhabiting resource-rich areas opened-up for foreign investment (Kimerling 1996; Newell 2007).

The use of the term ‘just transition’ is still evolving, and it has travelled a long way since it was first used by trade unions in the 1970s and 1980s (Räthzel and Uzzell 2013). Its meaning and implications are contested between those, on the one hand, imagining more incremental change and institutional innovations to amplify workers’ voices in existing processes, mobilising private finance to create new opportunities and leveraging state funds for retraining and compensation. And on the other, those articulating bolder visions of energy democracy and participatory democracy which centre on power shifts and moves from an extractivist to a regenerative economy which challenges the colonial mindset of growth at any cost, rather than just attending to who benefits most from dominant modes of extraction. The latter interpretations also tend to bring in issues such as restorative justice, intergenerational justice and, occasionally, justice for nature – dimensions which are downplayed in more orthodox framings about who gets what from growth. The difference is between ‘plug and play’ approaches to changing technologies and energy sources while leaving dominant patterns of production and consumption intact and attempts to shift power which seek to democratise control over those things (Newell 2021a), observable in calls among activists such as Groundworks in South Africa and *Justiça Ambiental* in Mozambique for ‘energy democracy’. As Movement Generation put it:

Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. An economy based on extracting from a finite system faster than the capacity of the system to regenerate will eventually come to an end – either through collapse or through our intentional re-organization. Transition is inevitable. Justice is not.  
(Movement Generation n.d.)

The term has become more prevalent in the last ten years or so, after the goal of achieving a just transition was incorporated into the negotiating text of the Copenhagen Summit in 2009 and later into the preamble to the historic Paris Agreement adopted in December 2015. It has also been adopted by labour-focused organisations such as the ILO, who link it closely to the green transition, green jobs and displaced workers, adopting their just transition guidelines in 2015 (Stavis and Felli 2020). Even so, many key actors have only recently begun to use the term and to engage with its implications. Relevant to our discussion here is work specifically focused on energy justice, which is taken to have three key elements: (1) distributional, (2) recognition, and (3) procedural justice (Sovacool and Dworkin 2015; Bickerstaff *et al.* 2013; McCauley *et al.* 2019). Jenkins *et al.* (2021) define these as lenses through which we can examine: (1) how costs and benefits are shared across society and where injustices arise, (2) who is (and whose interests are) represented, and whose



are ignored, and (3) whether processes for decision-making enable the engagement and participation of otherwise-excluded groups.

Scholars have, nevertheless, adopted different criteria and approaches to understanding these justice issues (Evans and Phelan 2016; Jenkins *et al.* 2018). Atteridge and Strambo (2020) offer ‘Seven Principles to realise a just transition to a low-carbon economy’, highlighting the need to directly address inequalities, ensure an inclusive and transparent planning process, clean up damage and ensure costs do not get passed from private to public sector in the process. Hirsch, Matthes and Fünfgelt (2017: 26–28) meanwhile developed a set of eight just energy transition principles designed to make justice applicable to energy transition processes in developing countries. Each principle is associated with indicators, and a formula is used to attach a final score to a country’s level of justice in the energy transition. Using this approach as a reference framework, the energy transitions in 12 global South countries are assessed. The principles are:

- **Climate Ambition Principle:** The energy transition reflects an ambitious attempt to achieve zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050, and thereby contributes to achieving the 1.5/2 degrees Celsius temperature goal.
- **NDC (Nationally-Determined Contribution)-SDG Alignment Principle:** The NDC-guided energy transition is closely aligned with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming at achieving sustainable development co-benefits.
- **Decent Work and Vulnerability Focus Principle:** The energy transition strives to create decent work in sustainable infrastructure development, reflects commitments to support those who are losing jobs and is focused specifically on those who are most vulnerable to climate risks and those who may lose their jobs due to the energy transition.
- **Social Equity Principle:** The measures taken should have a positive impact on social equity and should contribute to improving the socioeconomic integration of vulnerable groups.
- **Gender Equality Principle:** A gender impact assessment should be undertaken to avoid negative and to enhance positive effects on gender equality in the course of implementation.
- **Due Participation Principle:** Multistakeholder participation in the process from planning to implementation and evaluation should be in accordance with international good practice standards, and a dialogue on justice issues should be included in the transition process.
- **Good Governance Principle:** Transparency and accountability should be ensured in the implementation process.

- **Respect for Human Rights Principle:** Human rights should be respected in the energy transition, including the fulfilment of human rights obligations deriving from international human rights treaties that the country has ratified.

Williams and Doyon (2020) also apply a justice and system transition framework to the case study of the Energy Futures Lab, which focuses on fostering sustainability transition in energy in Alberta, Canada. The framework was developed to guide transitions from a justice perspective, to support practitioners and action researchers to design, facilitate, and implement transition processes, and for researchers to evaluate these processes. Key questions, risks, and mitigation strategies are provided for three forms of justice: distributive, procedural, and recognition. The framework aims to provide explicit guidance on how to pay attention to issues of power and justice. Wang and Lo (2021) highlight different just transition discourses including as a labour-oriented concept, as a theory of socio-technical transition where justice is thought to be achieved through carbon finance and access to lower-carbon technologies, and as a governance strategy for managing and addressing competing justice claims. In reality, we find many of these competing and overlapping discourses are present at the same time in contestations over energy transition pathways, but here our interest is more in the politics of articulating, mediating, and acting upon competing justice claims.

At the interface of climate and energy politics in the contemporary context lie a series of dilemmas and trade-offs about pathways, politics, and complex social choices (Newell 2021a). The tensions between efforts to address energy poverty, national energy security, and sustainability (particularly the need to rapidly decarbonise energy systems to address the climate crisis) have been described as the energy trilemma (Bradshaw 2010). These tensions are characterised by competing justice claims that need to be addressed as part of a just energy transition. As noted, there are different dimensions to just transitions, from procedural and recognition dimensions to distributive, restorative, and intergenerational aspects (Newell and Mulvaney 2013; Swilling and Annecke 2012; Heffron 2021). Any attempt to navigate the energy trilemma and achieve a 'just transition' that meets multiple (often necessarily subjective) justice criteria, however, must confront the key overall question of **'Who wins, who loses, how and why, from competing energy pathways within and beyond fossil fuels?'**

In earlier work we focused on spaces, voices and alliances, and within them the procedural and recognitional dimensions of justice (Newell *et al.* 2022b). Our key questions were 'Who gets consulted?', 'Who participates?', 'Who represents whom?', 'Who is identified as a legitimate stakeholder?', 'Which spaces are created for citizen voice?', and 'Who mobilises around just transitions?' Recognising that procedural and distributional elements are closely related,



however, we explored distributional and restorative aspects, asking ‘Who gains what – and who should gain what – from energy policy decisions?’ as well as ‘Who loses, and who or what should be the object of compensation?’ These aspects are inevitably bound up with intersectionalities of race, ethnicity, class, and gender, as well as with the global interrelationships involved in transitions (Hooper *et al.* 2021; Akuno *et al.* 2022). They involve not only questions about intra- and inter-societal dimensions (‘Who captures benefits?’ and ‘Who pays the costs?’) but also issues of intergenerational justice (‘What costs are passed onto future generations?’). The need to explore all these dimensions arises from the fact that no settled single definition of a ‘just transition’ exists.

Regarding gender, research on the gender equity aspects of energy systems in the global South (Johnson, Gerber and Muhoza 2019) demonstrates how gender and social norms limit women’s access to and participation in decision-making around energy (Clancy and Mohlakoana 2020; Kooijman-Van Dijk 2020; Lieu *et al.* 2020; Winther *et al.* 2020). More recently, feminist approaches to transitions and energy systems have been coming to the fore exploring the connections between labour, work, value and who and what energy is for (Stephens 2020; Daggett 2019). This enables critical reflection on what gets defined as ‘efficient’ and ‘productive’ and what is labelled as ‘wasteful’ as well as what and whose labour makes energy systems work at the intersection of exchange and care and public and private economies (Bell *et al.* 2020). This helps to expose the racial and gender hierarchies that uphold the energy system and constrain visions about viable and possible alternatives. This includes attention to the gendered nature of energy imaginaries, what Daggett (2018) has referred to as ‘petro-masculinities’ and ‘renewable masculinities’ which can be disrupted and threatened by new patterns of work and circulations of energy, or else merely serve to reproduce them if dominant power relations remain intact. Energy can be invoked as a tool to deal with gender inequities (ADB 2012), ‘a human development enabler’. As the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) notes;

Gender gaps related to access to energy, finances, training, employment and entrepreneurship need to be redressed. Policies that include both women and men in the development stage may help support more equitable access to electricity (grid and off-grid) and deliver more effective and sustainable outcomes. Therefore, more effort is needed to involve women in the design and production of locally appropriate energy technologies. Infrastructure projects designed to promote cleaner, more efficient forms of fossil fuels and renewable energy can offer new skills training and increased employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women, as well as more equitable benefit-sharing at the community level. (Habtezion 2016: 6)

Yet, while this framing around greater gender sensitivity in the design and production of technologies and infrastructures highlights key issues for just transitions, dominant approaches often fall short of challenging underlying power relations and gendered hierarchies. This is important when thinking about transitions to avoid focusing narrowly on more technocratic notions of governance as the management of diverse stakeholders. As roles in extracting, accessing, and using energy are gendered, so any attempt at energy transition (just or not) has gender dimensions: to be just, the transition has to be gender-equitable or gender-progressive as well as taking an intersectional perspective (Akuno *et al.* 2022; ILO 2017; SAGE Fund n.d.; S4C 2015). As many activists and some feminist academics are pointing out, 'energy transition is a feminist issue' because decarbonising our energy supply 'could provide opportunities to develop more socially just ways of living that put the concerns of those most exploited – women, people of color, and the global 99 per cent – at the core of energy transition politics' (Bell *et al.* 2020: 2). Furthermore, if transitions are to be truly transformational then gender-, race- and indigenous-dimensions need to be taken into account in navigating transitions, as argued in a primer on just transitions co-produced by the Transnational Institute and Grassroots Global Justice Alliance (Akuno *et al.* 2022). This 'more than fuel' account of energy and transitions in its systems of provision and consumption affords useful points of departure for exploring just transition alternatives. It also invites reflection on what happens to existing gender (as well as racial, indigenous, and class) hierarchies when fuels switch, independence is sought, and new patterns of work established. There has also been greater attention to questions of race (Newell 2021a; Donaghy *et al.* 2023; Akuno *et al.* 2022) as part of broader moves to develop more intersectional approaches (Johnson *et al.* 2020; Phillips and Petrova 2021) and to decolonise energy and the study and practice of energy transitions (Lennon 2017). The specific ways in which racial, class, and gender hierarchies configure transition pathways and politics will differ by context, but all transitions which aspire to be just will need to navigate these multiple and overlapping exclusions and inequalities.

In terms of the practical politics of just transition, discussions have been dominated to date by experiences (positive and negative) in wealthier parts of the world such as Europe (UK, Germany, Poland) and Australia, and largely focused on coal (Caldecott, Sartor and Spencer 2017). This raises a series of challenges about the generalisability of those experiences. Often assumptions are made about: (i) state capacity/ authority/ ability to convene/ to redistribute resources; (ii) absence of violence in the conduct of politics; (iii) engaged and powerful labour organisations; (iv) active civil society able to mobilise without fear of reprisal; and (v) business actors that recognise the need to address social dimensions of their investment practices (Newell *et al.* 2022b).

While these assumptions may be appropriate for discussions of just transition in wealthy countries with consolidated democracies (though not always in those contexts either), they poorly describe many settings around the world (Lacey-Barnacle, Robison and Foulds 2020). Many of these assumptions cannot be taken for granted elsewhere, including in the places we focus on here: Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria. Constrained civic space, in particular, circumscribes patterns and possibilities of participation, representation, and mobilisation (ICNL *et al.* 2022). Indeed, there are often strong incentives not to open-up what have traditionally been intra-elite discussions about energy pathways where key state and geopolitical concerns are at play, commercial interests strong but keen not to be subject to public scrutiny and the process often shaped by sensitive negotiations with donors, multilateral development banks, and private financiers. This combination of factors can conspire to shrink and contain the space and scope for meaningful citizen engagement with energy transitions and their multiple justice dimensions. It is worth noting in this regard that states are clearly differently placed in terms of their approach towards and inclination to open-up or protect spaces for citizen participation depending not just on degrees of democracy and institutional capacity, but also on these structural constraints and ties from levels of aid dependence to relations with investors and regional and multilateral institutions (Newell and Phillips 2016).

This begs the question: what strategies do people use where the state may be weak or have limited authority or legitimacy, where trade unions are not the key actors, and where civic space is limited? In many countries the appropriate location for decision-making on energy is often contested between central and local states, and access to electricity as well as to oil and gas revenues is often determined by support for ruling parties or ethnic groups. The resulting inequities in the distribution of revenues and impacts from fossil fuel extraction and the exclusion of some perspectives and interests from decision-making in energy and climate policy processes can lead to unruly and even violent forms of contestation (Newell *et al.* 2022b).

## 1.4 Dominant policy approaches to just transitions

To provide a supportive enabling context for just transitions globally, there has been growing interest from donors and multilateral development banks (MDBs) (Newell *et al.* 2023). In their High-Level Statement at the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in 2019, for example, MDBs committed to move away from fossil fuel use, through support for long-term low GHG emissions and climate-resilient strategies, and by developing financing and policy strategies that support a just transition. This resulted from the work of the MDB Paris Alignment Working Group to advance international support for a just transition. Since then, an independent technical paper has been commissioned and dialogues convened with a focus both on building MDB understanding of what a 'just

transition' is in different contexts, and identifying the MDB policies, instruments, and partnerships that can help support it. Key priorities now include developing High-Level Principles to guide MDB support for a just transition, advancing practice and peer learning, and establishing partnerships in support of a just transition. Their role is significant because international organisations directly impact on policy frameworks, financing, and project implementation, especially in the global South, where they provide a steer and a 'seal of approval' for private finance and establish policy orthodoxy about viable and desirable policy pathways (Newell and Bulkeley 2016).

Different institutions approach just transitions in different ways depending on their mandate and primary focus, their ideological approach, who they consider to be their core constituency and the power relations they embody. For example, while the ILO foresees a strong role for the state in managing the distributional impacts of just transitions, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) focus is on mobilising and de-risking finance and the International Renewable Energy Agency's (IRENA) is on support to renewable energy technologies. What results, according to Newell *et al.* (2023: 4–6), is a series of gaps:

1. A **horizontal gap** between dominant framings and practices of major global (economic) institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and regional development banks on the one hand, and labour and environment-centred organisations on the other that reflect different mandates, patterns of historical institutionalism, and ideologies;
2. A **vertical gap** manifested as a disconnect across levels of authority between the aspirations and framings of just transitions at the global level and the experiences of just transitions at a national (and local) level. This is evidenced through misaligned expectations around finance, levels of civil society and labour engagement, and assumptions about institutional capacity. These, in turn, point to a broader disconnect between:
3. **Rhetoric and reality**, the power of just transition as a mobilising discursive device yet its lack of traction as a guiding policy principle in a context of unequal power relations, levels of development, and shrinking civic space in many parts of the world. This manifests itself in poor levels of alignment between policies that could deliver transformative change in economic activities and international initiatives that prioritise financial interests. This results in:
4. **Political inconsistencies**, where tensions arise between the sorts of policies and interventions required to stimulate and ensure a just transition, and pressures to pursue and adopt policies and reforms which undermine these things. In the case of the former, examples include social protection schemes as well as policy levers to guide investment (such as infant industry

protection, use of subsidies, preferential tax arrangements) and expand spaces for civic engagement. Examples of the latter include trade and investment agreements, investor protections, power sector reform programmes, secretive procurement, and the removal of safety nets.

This underscores the need to learn from historical and emergent practice from other parts of the world to offer ‘live time’ insights into what sorts of just transitions might (and might not) be possible. For example, ‘Just energy transition partnerships’ are attracting a lot of attention and several countries are now negotiating them with donors and MDBs. South Africa has one in place and Indonesia, Vietnam, and Senegal are in negotiation to develop their own. Experience to date, however, suggests they fall far short of being able to cover the costs of transition and economic and social adjustment. For example, South Africa secured a US\$8.5bn pledge from five countries (the US, UK, Germany, France, and the EU) at COP26 for a Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), as part of the Glasgow Pact. Recognising that the US\$8.5bn is insufficient to deal with all South Africa’s transition investment requirements, many in South Africa see the JETP as a catalytic fund that can be used to attract other sources of climate and non-climate finance funds. In addition, the finance package was not new money, but money that had previously been assigned for investment in South Africa now repackaged as part of the US\$8.5bn deal. Some of the concessional finance comes with conditionalities from the main donors such that funding cannot go to initiatives that have explicit localisation provisions that might be considered important to distributional justice.

The JETP has been criticised on procedural grounds too – largely that the deal is ‘secret’ according to some civil society organisations (CSOs). Officials involved in the partnership, however, claim that it is far more transparent than other large infrastructure projects such as large dam projects and nuclear power projects. The main reason is that the JETP is of great public interest and had been announced with much fanfare at COP26. In truth, there is no formal mechanism to engage the views and concerns of a range of civil society groups – with local interests rather than foreign CSOs/non-governmental organisations (NGOs) being prioritised above international civil society as far as South Africa’s investment plan goes (Wemanya and Adow 2022). A United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)-organised seminar with activists on experience with JETPs to date highlighted concerns, such as:

1. An imbalance towards consultation with business with only ‘token participation’ being afforded to labour and civil society groups;
2. Narrow framings of just transitions as focused on mobilising and de-risking private finance combined with loans on terms dictated by donors; and

3. Concerns that JETPs are being used to push neo-liberal energy sector reforms (power sector reform, privatisation of state energy companies, etc.) and that key issues of economic justice and the drivers of unjust transitions are being neglected.<sup>3</sup>

Alternative visions for just transition in the region, on the other hand, have been marginalised (Sokona *et al.* 2023). For example, a Colombian activist with Trade Unions for Energy Democracy spoke about the struggle in her country to reclaim state ownership over all parts of the energy system in face of these pressures instead of ‘rolling out the red carpet’ to foreign multinationals such as Glencore, with whom indigenous groups such as the Yukpa are already in violent conflict (Coleman and Müllenbach Martínez 2023).

As we will see below, experience to date of dominant policy approaches to consultation, participation, and social acceptance in relation to energy transitions shows that formal spaces of participation have been created and used by states and private sector actors seeking to shape energy policy in their own favour, and less frequently and effectively by affected communities seeking different forms of energy and social justice. Power differentials (related to information and knowledge asymmetries, whose spaces they are, who sets the rules of engagement and in favour of whom) mean that more top-down consultation and participation strategies that depend entirely on invited spaces offer limited scope for identifying and then dealing with the range and complexity of justice issues associated with just transitions.

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3 Participation in a seminar on JETPs and their alternatives hosted by UNRISD, 11 July 2023.



## 2. Novel dimensions of just transitions

Recognising that contestation over resources and competing pathways for their use is not new, here we reflect on what is novel (and what is not) about just transitions: patterns of continuity and change to help situate the discussion about the distinct challenges facing poorer groups in Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria. We then extend the discussion beyond just transitions given that many models of just transition and analyses of experience to date are often informed by contexts very different to those we are working in. In surveying existing studies, academic and grey literature and reports from organisations active in this space to make the task manageable we:

1. Started with a focus on energy before moving outwards to other sectors and domains of resource governance; and
2. Looked where possible for lessons from the key countries covered in this study, but in each case sought to reflect on their relevance for just transitions more broadly.

In thinking about some of the novel justice dimensions which movements and citizens need to navigate/contend with in relation to just transitions, it is worth considering the following:

**Transformative systemic change**, the like of which has been called for by the IPCC (2018), **will not be achieved without widespread social buy-in**: This is because of the changes to production, consumption, modes of governance and lifestyles that it implies. There is a lot at stake and resistance to change is deep-seated as many forms of wealth creation in the current global economy depend on the large-scale use of fossil fuels, large swathes of which now need to be left in the ground if we are to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement (SEI *et al.* 2021). Tipping the balance of power in favour of the beneficiaries of transitions means overcoming resistance to change and bringing new stakeholders into policy design and implementation: disrupting politics as usual. Citizen engagement, through a variety of means and strategies, is one way to achieve this. It is often claimed that larger transitions will not be possible until citizens have demonstrated 'demand' for it, as politicians fear adopting unpopular measures and not bringing voters with them (Willis 2018). Such claims are frequently invoked to justify inaction or delay further action. They are claims that need to be treated with extreme caution: most people are rarely asked about the level and pace of change they would like to see, or which of the costs associated with doing nothing they would be willing to bear. Nor are they often provided with

explanations of implications and consequences, without which their inputs may have limited utility.

**The scope, scale, and temporality of the justice implications of both climate change and action to address it:** The interconnectedness of climate change means it affects everyone from local frontline communities to national and global stakeholders who are affected by climate change (albeit to different degrees and in different ways and over different timeframes). While this could open-up lots of possibilities for new alliances, in practice many struggles are stuck in particular silos and associated with different interests that make it difficult to join up on the common goal. This further complicates the work of alliance-building across spaces, regions, and sectors. This can be exacerbated by what has been referred to as the ‘governance trap’ where politicians are reluctant to accelerate transitions for fear of public backlash, yet the public expects leadership on the part of politicians often resulting in the misreading and misallocation of rights and responsibilities between individuals and institutions (Newell *et al.* 2015).

**The geopolitics of energy transitions:** The use of strategic economic and political power by regional and global ‘great’ powers to secure energy often marginalises justice concerns. This is reflected in the way in which the costs and benefits of different energy pathways are unevenly distributed within and between societies, including the use of spatial and temporal ‘fixes’ to pass the costs of adjustment onto other societies (by outsourcing the most carbon-intensive parts of industrial processes while still importing the finished goods) or into the future where future generations will pay the price for pathways not taken (Newell 2021a; Sovacool *et al.* 2019). But shifting geopolitics bring additional challenges: for mobilisation, for allocating responsibility, and in relation to historical and contemporary grievances about hypocrisy over who and what the energy is for and who sets the terms of the debate (Blondeel *et al.* 2021).

Key here are also vernacular understandings of geo-politics: who is perceived to benefit from particular transition pathways and who the losers are considered to be. For example, objections to the DESERTEC proposal in North Africa rested on the fact that the solar energy to be generated was largely to be exported to Europe from a region suffering with low levels of energy access (Newell and Mulvaney 2013). Similar claims are made by communities in the Niger Delta who rarely see the benefits of oil rents extracted from their land. Likewise, despite pressure from the international community to leave fossil fuels in the ground, the government of Ecuador’s request for funds to forego revenues that could be obtained from oil extraction in the biodiverse Yasuni national park, did not attract sufficient support from major donors and was subsequently abandoned (Sovacool and Scarpaci 2016). Most recently, in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, we have seen renewed interest by European and other powers in gas



exports from Africa, including Mozambique: an apparent shift away from their rhetoric about encouraging African countries to move away from fossil fuels when threatened with cuts in their supply of gas from Russia (Global Energy Monitor 2023).

**Interconnectedness of energy pathways:** Building on the previous two points, it is clear that energy pathways in one place often impact elsewhere, meaning that just and unjust impacts from energy transitions are unevenly distributed across regions and social groups. Classic examples are the food riots that result from rising prices of corn triggered by biofuel expansion in Europe and the US (Smith 2000) or the ‘renewable extractivism’ driving mining of lithium, cobalt and nickel for renewable energy and battery production (Dunlap 2018; Soto Hernandez and Newell 2022; Carley and Konisky 2020). Enclave economies (Gallagher and Zarsky 2007) and export zones that are constructed to meet external demand, often devoid of adequate regulation and rights protection to make them more attractive to investors, are indicative of the uneven patterns of exposure to harm and unequal protection that environmental justice literatures highlight (Bullard 2005). Around energy, the language of ‘sacrifice zones’ is often used, informed by the experience of locating nuclear waste sites and mining activities on the land of indigenous groups (Brook 1998). For justice advocates, this creates a challenge for accountability across scales and spaces and attempts to intervene across lengthy supply chains (Healy *et al.* 2019). This makes energy transitions a socially and ecologically relational affair and ultimately requires a global analysis of justice transitions to understand their multiple dimensions. How and by whom social and environmental costs are distributed are the core of the contentious politics.

**Questions of how to reconcile speed and inclusion** (or equity and urgency): The need to accelerate the pace and scale of transition is clear from the gap between climate commitments and the emissions cuts required to avoid catastrophic levels of global heating as outlined in the UN Emissions Gap Report (UNEP 2022). Layered upon this is the ‘production gap’ which shows governments around the world planning to extract 110 per cent more fossil fuels by 2030 than are compatible with achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement (SEI *et al.* 2021). The scale of reconfiguring the energy sector required here should not be underestimated. It is no longer a question of adding another source/technology to the mix, but rather about the managed decline of some industries. This invites questions about who manages this and, on whose behalf, and what alternatives are being built (Lenferna 2018). At the moment, renewable energy is adding to the energy mix but not displacing fossil fuels. But as this starts to happen in the context of the falling price of renewables, conflict will intensify over competing pathways and winners and losers.

An important component of this discussion is the **materiality of fossil fuels**. Oil, coal, and gas are often located in more remote areas, amenable to the employment of less-skilled workers, but who often have less political power in their own right. Modes of transportation make them easier to disrupt (through strikes, sabotage, etc.) (Mitchell 2011), but they are also seen as more convenient and affordable to many. The ‘lootability’ of oil (Bridge and LeBillon 2013) makes it attractive to elites and isolates them from citizen and social movement demands. Fossil fuels lend themselves to rentier politics and the dangers of the ‘resource curse’, which protects elites from responsiveness to citizens (Ross 2012; Watts 2008). Conversely, renewable and community-owned energy is thought to provide, in a literal and figurative sense, ‘power to the people’ and can, on one level, be disruptive of dominant power relations if not dominant modes of extractivism (Dunlap 2018; Soto Hernandez and Newell 2022).

The IPCC Special Report on *Global Warming of 1.5°C* spoke clearly of the need for ‘transformative systemic change’ (IPCC 2018). Yet the just transition debate shows that change must be inclusive and attentive to questions of justice. This potentially creates a demand for speed generated by investors, governments, and NGOs concerned with avoiding key tipping points in conflict with the often-slower processes of dialogue, deliberation, and building alternatives. Newell *et al.* (2022a) identify and elaborate two important tensions that policymakers face when they want to simultaneously achieve both just and rapid low-carbon transitions. First, the way in which participatory processes may increase justice (for some) but slow the speed of action (for others), often deflecting the need for change. They suggest that ‘despite their undoubted promise and value, we need greater clarity about **which issues** and **for whom** enhanced citizen engagement works well’ (Newell *et al.* 2022a: 1). For example, citizen engagement can be useful in harnessing input to local plans for net-zero around issues where citizens have a direct stake in the outcome (such as local housing or transport policy) but faces different sets of challenges when trying to address equity trade-offs across societies where one country’s transition pathway might impact another. To take an example, demands to expand electric vehicles articulated by citizens in wealthier parts of the world are not balanced by high levels of citizen engagement of poorer and often indigenous communities affected by the mining and extraction that follow because of rising demand for materials such as lithium and cobalt for batteries. In other instances, public consultations are designed to sideline citizen engagement. In Canada, for instance, industry groups trying to justify nuclear waste storage in marginalised and often indigenous communities deployed ‘public consultation sessions’ not to solicit meaningful public input, but instead as a public relations exercise to either demonstrate consent and approval (when they got it) or to present the public as having fragmented values and opinions that would never be overcome (when they did not get it), which justifies them being overruled (Durant 2007).

Second, incumbent mobilisation can accelerate transitions but entrench injustices (Newell *et al.* 2022a). For example, incumbents often have the technological capabilities and intellectual property needed for scaling low-carbon innovations like electric vehicles, heat pumps, offshore wind, nuclear reactors, hydrogen or CCS (Carbon Capture and Storage). But working with incumbents is likely to privilege certain types of (large-scale) transition pathways and neglect others which seek to advance just transitions rather than scale up technologies as an end in itself. Likewise, the financial actors that can provide such large sums of money (like state development banks, pension funds, or commercial banks) prefer to invest in large-scale options such as offshore wind parks and rarely embrace justice concerns over short-term returns on investment. This shifts the focus from mapping justice dimensions to acknowledging the inevitable trade-offs and winners and losers produced by transition processes as a first step to better navigating them. But it also raises questions of 'post-politics', narrowing terms of debate but also strategic use of crisis discourses by all actors to accelerate or delay action (Swyngedouw 2010). As Newell *et al.* suggest:

Resolving these complex and often intractable issues through ever expanding circles of participation and 'stakeholder engagement' can then become a strategy of delay: it prioritises a narrow notion of procedural justice in order to delay distributional justice. This suggests the need for participatory spaces to be aligned with the need for rapid and deep transitions so that the deliberation is more over different pathways and less the speed or depth of change required. But it also suggests the limits of seeing citizen engagement as a panacea for addressing all justice issues in transitions.  
(Newell *et al.* 2022a: 2)

These challenges are compounded by the **traditionally closed and sensitive nature of energy policymaking**. Because of its relationship to core state objectives of growth and security, commercial confidentiality and high demands for technical and legal competence are invoked as reasons to delimit citizen engagement with questions of energy policy. This generic feature of energy policy is further complicated by the fact that many of the new resource frontiers (for both fossil fuels and renewable energy) are in regions where patterns of social inclusion are more entrenched (enclave economies, contested indigenous lands, etc.) (ICNL *et al.* 2022). Spaces of civic engagement are being closed down or actively shrunk, amid control of media, the spread of false information, corporate surveillance and government monitoring of citizens. Risks to activism in general, and environmental defenders in particular, are especially high (Global Witness 2017). The world is a risky place for environmental defenders, tens of thousands of whom sacrifice their lives each year defending the environment. For example, in a seminar on 'Carbon bombs' in Africa, Ilham Rawook of Justiça Ambiental in Mozambique spoke of communities' fear of reprisal when speaking

out about issues of displacement, violence, and pollution associated with fossil fuel expansion in Cabo Delgado (Climate Action Network International and LINGO 2023).

**The challenges of deepening citizen engagement are not unique to energy transitions.** Here, therefore, we draw on relevant experience from other policy domains to enhance our understanding of the limits and opportunities of citizen engagement. For example, the technical nature of the topic and the difficulty in communicating it is a challenge for citizen engagement in trade and investment policy too; the long timeframes apply equally to other environmental threats and powerful status quo actors exist in most sectors of the global economy. Many such actors, including those we focus on here, either historically or currently are embroiled in conflict. This brings an additional challenge in that while just transition discussions often focus on national plans, strategies and visions, many of the conflicts are located in regions often either beyond central government authority or where the state itself is in conflict with social groups there. Moreover, the notion of cohesive national visions, plans or ‘socio-technical imaginaries’ (Jasanoff and Kim 2015; Jasanoff 2018) around which different actors can converge and agree belies the everyday and short-term politics of negotiation, compromise, and getting by.

What makes citizen engagement with just transitions so difficult is the combination and simultaneous interplay of these factors:

1. The dispersed prospective beneficiaries of climate action within and between societies;
2. The fact that some of the greatest beneficiaries are not yet born, yet the costs of action have to be paid now;
3. The scale, enormity, and complexity of the challenge which can be overwhelming; the paucity of levers of change over which citizens seemingly have direct control;
4. The still low salience of the issue compared to other issues which dominate mainstream and social media; and
5. The strength of opposition to transformative action.

So, we need to reflect on what is unique about the challenges of citizen engagement for just transitions, but also where lessons and good practice can be drawn upon from attempts to involve citizens in other policy domains and arenas.

## 2.1 Understanding citizen engagement with just transitions

The remainder of the paper seeks to summarise insights from a diverse set of literatures and experience around issues of amplifying and representing **voices**, creating and defending **space**, and building **alliances** that directly or indirectly pertain to just transitions. The discussion covers issues of whose voices count: the politics of participation, representation, and intermediation; the spectrum of invited, closed, and claimed spaces of participation as well as attempts to work outside of them by protest and social movements. This is where alliances are vital to the success of efforts to integrate justice issues into societal deliberations over energy futures at different levels and across the different spaces of energy politics we analyse. The paper demonstrates a rich and diverse ecology of participation, one that is not static but dynamic: affected by shifting geopolitics and the closing of civic space in many contexts and often taking place in the shadow of violent resource politics, but also finding cracks, creating new openings and building momentum for change. The picture we paint of the current landscape of (in)justice can only ever be a snapshot and a broad survey of insights and reflections on strategy that will always need to be adapted to diverse lived realities structured by relations of class, race, and gender.

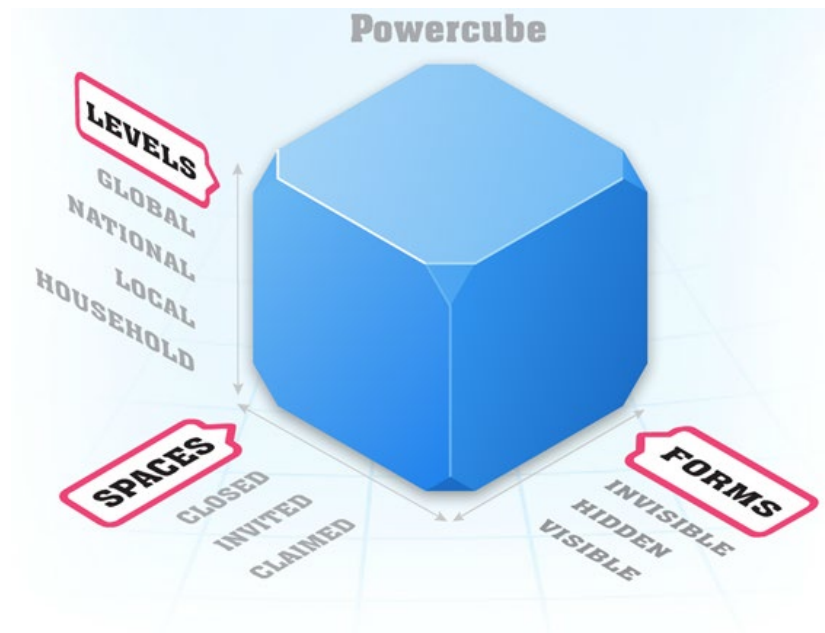
Though we have analysed voices, spaces, and alliances separately, in reality successful interventions need to simultaneously amplify voice, contest and create new spaces, and build new alliances effectively (Mundaca, Busch and Schwer 2017). As Gaventa suggests in relation to his 'power cube' model,

Transformative, fundamental change happens... in those rare moments when social movements or social actors are able to work effectively across each of the dimensions simultaneously, i.e. when they are able to link the demands for opening previously closed spaces with people's action in their own spaces; to span across local and global action, and to challenge visible, hidden and invisible power simultaneously. Just like the Rubik's cube, successful change is about getting each of the pieces on each dimension of the cube to align with each other, simultaneously.

(Gaventa 2006: 30)

It is more helpful to think in terms of there being an ecosystem of transformation with different lever points that actors can use to propel climate action which reflect the arenas and spaces they have access to, the resources they have available to them, and their overall aims (Newell *et al.* 2021).

## Box 2.1 Spaces, forms, and levels of power



The forms, spaces and levels of power interact.

**Forms** relate to how power manifests itself:

- Visible: focuses on who participates and predominates in observable decision-making;
- Hidden: keeps certain issues, interests and voices out of the decision-making process or off the public agenda;
- Invisible: internalised beliefs and norms, or lack of awareness which means that certain voices do not speak and certain issues and inequities go unquestioned.

**Spaces** of power refer to potential arenas for participation and action:

- Closed: decisions are made behind closed doors without broad consultation or participation;
- Invited: people are invited to participate in public arenas but within set boundaries;
- Claimed: less powerful people or groups create their own spaces where they can shape their own agenda.

**Levels** refer to the multiple layers or levels of power in a global world:

- Global: formal and informal sites of decision-making beyond the nation state;
- National: governments, parliaments, political parties, coalitions or other forms of authority, usually linked to nation states;
- Local: sub-national governments, councils and associations at the local level;
- Household: the micro level, which may be outside of the public sphere, but which helps to shape what occurs within it.



There are many ways of thinking about citizen spaces for change and typologies of spaces and ladders of participation (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). There are also many rationales and drivers of citizen engagement on energy issues as noted above. Institutionalised public participation through invited spaces is seen as an important vehicle by which states can defend their claims to represent a broad notion of the public interest, especially perhaps because the public (albeit some publics more than others), will be expected to bear the costs of adjustments associated with transitions. Key to public trust is evidence that governments' policies reflect a careful consideration of issues including social and environmental concerns, for example, and are not merely designed to serve special interests. There is an important distinction here between popular participation and the participation of organised civil society (Albán 2003). Participation can allow for more complete information and priority-setting and therefore better-quality decision-making. CSOs can inject new ideas and specialised expertise, and lend technical support to delegations lacking capacity. There is also a complementary role for citizen participation in monitoring and enforcement, filling gaps left by governments and regional bodies.

Not only does citizen engagement with energy transitions take different forms in a variety of places at distinct moments in time, the challenges of engagement shift across the policy cycle. This is true of engagements around new plans for projects, infrastructures and the introduction of technologies, to contestations around location, costs and benefits and how these are distributed, appropriate regulation and impact assessments, through to the output phase of monitoring commitments and agreements and holding public and private actors to account for their social and environmental responsibilities. The discussion below tries to shed light on those multiple intervention points that can be activated to surface justice issues in transition debates.

## 2.2 Voices

Who participates in energy policies? Whose voices count? As noted above, for reasons of the sensitivity of energy issues, concerns with commercial confidentiality, the forms of knowledge and expertise that are considered to be legitimate and valued, democratising energy politics presents a series of challenges for those affected by key decisions in the energy domain. There are often **concentric circles** with insiders and experts generally nearer the centre. Procedural barriers to meaningful participation include inadequate periods of notice; the language used to announce consultations (often not the one used by poorer communities); the location of consultations (often far from where projects will be hosted); the time required (when people are working or looking for work); and the costs of attending and engaging with participatory processes (Newell 2005, 2014). Layered upon these are the 'cognitive injustices' (Visvanathan 2005), where the knowledge and voice of economists, lawyers, and engineers is

often privileged over that of other forms of ‘lay’, experiential knowledge and citizen science.

### 2.2.1 The case for citizen engagement

In their report *Gender, Race and Social Inclusion – Net Zero Transitions*, Hooper *et al.* note:

The representation of users’ diverse needs and interests, as well as their participation in decision-making, is critical for an inclusive transition. The need to understand how net-zero policies and the deployment of low-carbon technologies impacts the lives and the experiences of vulnerable people is critical. The capacity that users have to engage with the transition depends on their access to technologies, agency in decision-making and flexibility to adopt and engage with low-carbon behaviours and technologies. It will also critically depend on how their needs and aspirations are represented and understood. Misrepresentation of users can result in their voices not being heard, and their needs not being met by low-carbon policies and technologies. New inequalities can arise and existing ones can be reproduced. Building widespread social ownership of transition plans is necessary for their success.

(Hooper *et al.* 2021: 7–8)

Demands for citizen engagement around transitions are often expressed in the first instance as a concern over potential public resistance and the need to gain societal ‘acceptance’ for urgent yet difficult policy decisions and technological changes (Roddis *et al.* 2018). Fear of public backlash is often a key driver for testing policy interventions with stakeholders and representatives of different publics. Secondly, the concern with citizen engagement can centre on the desire to change the behaviours of citizens, shifting or ‘nudging’ them into more sustainable patterns of energy use (Dubois *et al.* 2019). For example, think of public awareness-raising campaigns around energy efficiency and conservation measures such as switching off lights and so on, or more proactively around gauging acceptance of measures to change behaviour (restrictions on car use, taxes on fuel, etc.). Though such interventions are targeted at general populations, in reality they need to target polluter elites (Kenner 2019) rather than the majority of citizens, especially in poorer regions. But thirdly, there are also increasingly prevalent arguments that citizens themselves should drive sustainability transitions in more distributed, collaborative and ‘bottom-up’ ways, through community energy, grass-roots innovations and ‘prosumer’ movements, as part of a broader democratisation of systems of provision (Smith *et al.* 2016).



The argument for participatory governance emphasises that hierarchical steering characterised by a government-led, expert-centred approach can lead to poor policymaking, as well as being disempowering for citizens themselves (Stirling 2005). In many least developed country settings, this is exacerbated by limited regulatory capacity, reflecting human-resource and financial constraints, as well as a dearth of reflexive governance mechanisms. It has been argued that governments, therefore, need to involve non-state stakeholders in the business sector and civil society to plug gaps in capacity, implementation, and expertise (Wesselink *et al.* 2011). Furthermore, comprehensive participatory processes and spaces for citizen engagement open-up novel and alternative pathways for decarbonisation and adaptation, which can then be navigated and chosen through more democratic means, rather than through top-down technocratic approaches. This helps to counter the tendency to make policy decisions based on 'imagined publics', which are subjective social representations based on assumptions and beliefs about abilities, knowledges, identities, behaviours, and responsibilities (Rodhouse *et al.* 2021). The use of imagined publics can become problematic when simplistic and stereotypical biases are used as a shorthand creating barriers to citizens' access and engagement with decision-making processes.

Some imagined publics are recognised, involved and acknowledged, while others are not (Chilvers, Pallett and Hargreaves 2018). For example, Boss *et al.* (2023) explore the inclusion and exclusion of marginalised voices in the just transition process in Bristol, UK, a city that has been pursuing a just transition to climate change since 2020. Their observations of decision-making processes at three levels (public sector, private sector, and civil society) find it is exclusionary, especially for women and ethnic minorities. This highlights the need for more inclusive decision-making in both formal policymaking spaces and in broader policy formation processes, to create space for a variety of perspectives. Care needs to be taken to avoid tokenism in this process and that innovative public consultation processes are adopted where 'Fair and inclusive decision-making must be an ongoing process that must be returned to time and time again as part of just transition' (Boss *et al.* 2023: 14).

Another example is the co-opting or sidelining of indigenous concerns about offshore wind development in the US. The concerns and perspectives of indigenous communities are mostly brought forth by non-group members in legally mandated decision-making processes and were found to be leveraged or diminished by non-indigenous individuals pushing anti- or pro-offshore wind sentiment. The formal consultation process for the offshore wind projects hence inadvertently gave outsized voice to lesser impacted communities (Bacchiocchi, Sant and Bates 2022). Research reflects a growing realisation of the problems associated with such narrower and instrumentalised forms of community engagement (Ryder *et al.* 2023).

It is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all for effective and inclusive citizen engagement. Degrees of democratic space, capacity, levels of civil society mobilisation around the issue and degrees of government and business ambition vary widely (Lacey-Barnacle *et al.* 2023). The ways people engage with transitions, and how and by whom spaces of engagement are organised makes a big difference to who participates and about what (Chilvers *et al.* 2021). The variety of civic spaces and forms of citizen engagement reflects different governance systems, political cultures, and degrees of engagement with climate change and energy issues. The latter in turn is often a function of perceptions of historical responsibility and contemporary understandings of capacity and willingness to act. Upon this is grafted an everchanging political and economic landscape within states in terms of crises, controversies, and the cycle of elections (at least, in democratic settings) as well as globally. Issue attention cycles are shaped by these factors, as well as news cycles, which are rarely conducive to sustained and informed citizen engagement with the complexity of transitions.

### **2.2.2 Public participation – but for what, when, and for whom?**

Participatory processes offer the potential for a more comprehensive and inclusive evidence base by including local, traditional, experiential, and alternative knowledge, which may improve decision-making by raising awareness of potential social and environmental impacts of infrastructural developments or proposed policies that had not been considered or by bringing other values and possible alternatives to the table. Social acceptance literature also suggests that public participation has contributed to public acceptance of renewable energy projects in countries including Germany, Denmark, Canada, South Africa, and Malaysia amongst many others (Renn *et al.* 2014; Wan Abdullah *et al.* 2020). Involvement of local citizens and actors in the funding and governance of sustainable energy transitions has been shown to provide benefits such as increasing the economic spin-offs and transforming the role of citizens from that of consumers to more active proponents for transition (Rüdinger 2019). There is also growing interest in grass-roots innovation and the nurturing of alternative technological and financial models to accelerate climate action from below (Smith *et al.* 2016; Smith and Ely 2015). The depth and the progressive nature of this move towards participatory governance, however, has been questioned amid claims about the incompatibility of neo-liberalising programmes and participatory governance (Abram 2007, 2008). These concerns highlight how participatory or inclusive governance may be hijacked, deflecting local resistance through ‘talking shops’ rather than offering effective democratic and inclusive governance.

It is certainly the case that public participation in formal invited spaces does not guarantee equitable outcomes. Engaging publics is a time-consuming and costly

process and may not result in consensual nor optimal outcomes. Involving citizens may give rise to scepticism rather than enhancing trust when the participants express doubts or challenge the equity and sincerity of the participatory processes and outcomes in terms of policy impacts. Frustration can arise when participants perceive that those participatory approaches are used as a means of deflecting protest, inhibiting actions, or ‘rubber-stamping’ a predetermined decision that will have tangible impacts on citizens’ everyday lives and the extent to which and ways in which their inputs are to be used is left unclear. Meaningful citizen engagement requires a commitment on the part of those creating spaces for citizen engagement that the outcomes of the process will be recognised and acted upon. Or that where they are not, reasons and justifications will be given.

Who finances transitions influences how much say citizens will have over the direction and nature of the energy pathway (Cholibois 2020; Setyowati 2021). Neoliberal energy transitions, combined with power sector reform programmes and other externally negotiated restructuring, delimits the space for citizen engagement over pathways that are already prescribed by those with control over finance or technology (Newell and Phillips 2016; McDonald 2002). Earlier work on carbon markets (seen as a key means to finance energy transitions) showed how at project, national, and international level, significant governance gaps in representation and participation meant that alleged beneficiaries (as well as potential victims) of carbon financed energy projects are rarely included in decisions about which projects to finance and where and who captures the gains (Newell 2014). To add to this complex landscape, a further consideration is the role of rising powers, especially Chinese investments in energy infrastructures in Africa and Latin America around fossil fuels as well as hydropower and renewable energies (Power *et al.* 2016; Shen and Power 2017). Concerns have been raised that while Western donors and MDBs such as the World Bank are more insistent on citizen participation in planning and approval processes, the conduct of social and environmental impact assessments and use of safeguarding policies, no such conditions are attached to loans and investments from the Chinese government and state development bank. As Gore notes:

China does not abide by the same operational policies that the World Bank and Western bilateral donors follow when undertaking or financing infrastructure projects... The potential benefit of working with China is further heightened in African countries that are transitional democracies, that have weak concentrations of civil society organisations, or that have simply grown frustrated with the time it takes to implement projects following global norms and policies.

(Gore 2017: 17)

### 2.2.3 Inclusion of workers' and local community voices

Regarding industrial conversion and the emergence of new markets, engaging citizens regarding their livelihoods, job security, skills and training, and the future direction that their respective industries take in the near future is vital to the success of just transitions. Evidence suggests that many workers in heavily polluting or fossil fuel industries support the idea of transitioning to more sustainable jobs when provided with support and skills and training, although these findings will not be reflected in every industry or country (Oczkowska and Pellerin-Carlin 2019). Both the support of just transition measures and resistance to their implementation emphasise the need to engage citizens, and specifically workers, on matters of climate action to overcome industry resistance to action. Insights into social dialogues on just transitions with workers gathered from discussions with union members, fossil fuel workers and communities in the UK and Canada highlight the importance of broadening the appeal of messaging across the political spectrum and the language used (for example, a focus on 'fairness' instead of 'justice'), acknowledging that a just energy transition will not be easy, avoiding blame, and consideration of who trusted communicators are likely to be (Webster and Shaw 2019). This also reinforces the importance of not treating workers from fossil fuel-reliant industries as a homogenised whole, which may disguise the reality of structural inequality (including racial and gendered differences) and mask the differences among workers' visions of a just transition (Wang and Lo 2022).

There is a need for country- and industry-specific initiatives given the diversity of approaches to just transitions, the sheer number of organisations and institutions engaging with the concept, as well as the variation in resistance to transitional initiatives. Previous work on worker sentiments in the UK offers some insights into how to integrate the voice of workers (Platform 2020). But of course, the UK is a wealthy industrialised economy where fossil fuel-dependent work makes up a relatively small number of total employment and where governance mechanisms may be sophisticated enough and sufficiently resourced to design, fund, and implement a just transition. There is also a degree of skill transferability between the offshore oil and gas industry and offshore wind, which make wholesale transitions easier and less costly. In other contexts, however, just transition efforts may bring about significant resistance from a powerful 'minerals energy-complex' (Baker *et al.* 2014) such as in South Africa which has a development pathway that is deeply entangled with the extraction and combustion of coal. Coal generates over 80 per cent of South Africa's electricity, is one their largest exports by value, and employs hundreds of thousands of people in the value chain amid high rates of national unemployment (Cocks 2021). Pursuing a just transition for coal workers in South Africa presents a myriad of challenges that are specific to its economy, energy mix, trade policy and communities (McDonald 2002), which cautions against one-size-fits-all

policies and underscores the importance of more contextual and community-specific approaches.

Furthermore, community support for energy transition in extractive communities is often conditional on addressing historical environmental injustices first, with the presentation of a clear and predictable roadmap for righting the wrongs which communities hold fossil fuel companies responsible for. A study in Nigeria by the NGO Spaces for Change (S4C) explored the inclusiveness of Nigeria's energy transition agenda through interviews and focus group discussions with traditional chiefs, artisanal refiners, elders' councils, women, and youth leaders in three states in 2022 (S4C 2022). It found that national transition plans are silent about the needs and interests of host communities, or how to cater to these. In particular, plans lack reference to historical and ongoing injustices around environmental damage from oil extraction or arrangements for clean-up, remediation, compensation, and rehabilitation. Energy transition proposals from oil and gas corporations also lack strong commitment to communities, retaining the tradition of shallow commitments that relegate communities to mere spectators and beneficiaries of social programmes (*ibid.*: 41). The exclusion of local voices and real community needs from these plans is responsible for the huge disconnect between policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria, demonstrating how local realities are often neglected from transition agendas. The study also demonstrated 'the huge differentials in the meanings and constructs of just transitions across contexts, tribes and ethnic groups' (*ibid.*: 53).

The Just Transition Alliance (JTA) in California provides one practical example of citizen-led action for just transition. The JTA is a coalition of environmental justice and labour organisations that bring together frontline workers and community members who live alongside polluting industries to create healthy workplaces and communities. It focuses on contaminated sites that should be cleaned up, and on the transition to clean production and sustainable economies. For instance, on issues such as 'clean coal', the JTA voices objections based on both local and global impacts, including local air pollution, working conditions and detrimental environmental impacts of mining on local landscapes and water use. 'City Retrofit' Los Angeles, meanwhile, is a grass-roots coalition of community-based organisations, trades unions, and environmental groups that campaigned to ensure that programmes by the city council to improve energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy also brought economic benefits to disadvantaged people living in the city. This included retrofit of public buildings in low-income communities, jobs for poorer people and supporting businesses owned by local minorities and women. Likewise, in Australia's Hunter Valley, communities mobilised to take hold of their own transition. Community distress about the cumulative local ecological and human health impacts of mines and power stations and alarm about global climate change have given rise to a vocal, growing and globally linked social



movement that is challenging the primacy of coal and demanding a transition from coal dependency to a clean energy economy. Key aspects of a just transition to a low-carbon economy that protects vulnerable communities include boosting resilience and adaptive capacity, public investment in the industries of the future, and alliances amongst the climate justice, environment, and labour movements (Bird and Lawton 2009; Evans 2010; JTA 2011).

Exploring these dynamics in another context, Barragan-Contreras (2022) qualitatively analyses the implementation of a large-scale photovoltaic project in Yucatan, Mexico, examining how neighbouring indigenous communities and other key actors perceive, experience, and react to procedural and socioenvironmental justice issues. Results show that commonly used concepts such as consent, participation and inclusion, as currently applied in the siting of renewable infrastructure, are now mostly perceived as serving the legitimization of projects that align with the developer and governmental priorities. Emphasising self-determination over and above the aforementioned concepts is seen as a priority among affected communities for achieving a more socially just energy transition. Other work on coal mines in Cesar, Colombia provides insights into issues of involuntary resettlement ordered by the government's own Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (Reyes 2020). The resettlement plan sought to generate mechanisms of information, communication, and participation to involve the (directly and indirectly) impacted population as well as the local and regional authorities in all stages of the participatory resettlement plan. This included reinstating by collective and individual agreement the productive activities of the affected communities in relation to land, crops, and agrarian infrastructure (Reyes 2020).

#### 2.2.4 The politics of delegation, intermediaries, and representation

There is often an important **politics of delegation, intermediaries, and representation** at work here in attempts to increase citizen voice (Lacey-Barnacle and Bird 2018). For example, experimentation with citizen and climate assemblies reveals sensitivities about processes of 'sortition'<sup>4</sup> used to select a cross-section of the community to participate, as well as issues of which people are put forward as experts (Willis 2020). Our own experience of being involved in the discussions about how best to organise the local climate assembly in Brighton in the UK was also that citizens invited into these spaces want some upfront guarantees that the recommendations will be taken seriously and acted upon, while local government officials are reluctant to make such commitments

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4 Sortition (or a citizens' lottery) is the method used to select individuals. Organisations such as the Sortition Foundation have been involved in the process for many citizens' assemblies to date. A predetermined number of people is decided upon. That number of people are then randomly contacted to see if they wish to participate. From those that respond, a number (usually between 50 and 250 people) are selected to take part in the assembly.

until they have seen what the recommendations are. In reality, the range of topics that are open for discussion when local powers and resources are confined to some sectors and not others, is often quite narrow. For example, though people may want to discuss energy, housing, and transport issues which affect their daily lives, the provision of many of these services has been outsourced and privatised or decision-making is beyond the remit and powers of local government officials.

Intermediaries can play a range of roles in transitions, with varying capacities to influence change, and though perceived to be neutral often strongly advocate for certain positions (Kivimaa *et al.* 2019). Specifically, intermediaries can play a key role in relation to participatory processes around energy projects such as in prior consultation processes for renewable energy development and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, through helping to balance power and knowledge asymmetries (Vega-Araújo and Heffron 2022). For example, to help balance the power in terms of knowledge asymmetries and representation during consultations for FPIC in Colombia, communities have the right to be provided with external experts with the knowledge and experience that communities often lack for analysing a project's impacts (Vega-Araújo and Heffron 2022). However, some research suggests FPIC processes have tended to favour the interests of companies and governments at the expense of indigenous groups and have failed to include the right to give and withhold consent (Mebratu-Tsegaye and Kazemi 2020). For example, concerns have been reported around the legitimate representation of indigenous communities during consultation processes for wind energy projects in La Guajira region, Colombia – where indigenous Wayúu represent half of the population. This includes issues around unbalanced company–community negotiation for compensation and undue pressure suffered by the community both from the company and from community advisors leading to potentially unfair agreements for the communities (Vega-Araújo and Heffron 2022).

The complexity of decision-making across sites and scales magnifies these issues of intermediary representation, which can end up widening or exacerbating regional and urban/rural dynamics, resulting in an 'urban bias'. This is often a function of where consultations are held: often in capital cities in conference centres or hotels that are largely not accessible or welcoming to poorer groups. Activists claiming to speak on behalf of communities and even members (in the case of trade unions, etc.) or in agrarian contexts where campaigns against specific technologies invoke the interests of broader peasantries often without their direct consent or participation (Borras *et al.* 2008; Edelman 2003; Newell 2008). Furthermore, participation can be understood very differently by different groups. For example, Ruef, Stauffacher and Ejderyan (2020) found that the view and expectations of participation differed greatly between managers and residents in a geothermal energy programme in Geneva,



which led to some misunderstandings and blind spots. Though the move to online and digital participation is often heralded as holding democratising potential (think of petitions that can trigger debates in parliaments in places such as the UK, for example), in many contexts the ‘digital divide’ between richer and poorer citizens and inequities in access to the internet between rural and urban citizens in many parts of the world compromises their potential for inclusivity (Hooper *et al.* 2021).

### 2.2.5 Patterns of participation

In turn, **patterns of participation** reflect deeper inequalities (race, class, gender, ability, and ethnicity/indigeneity). For example, many frontlines of extractivism are in contested indigenous/tribal territories, and we know from scholarship and activism on feminist political ecology that struggles for environmental and energy justice are heavily gendered both in terms of disproportionate impacts, uneven access to spaces and institutions to contest them and lack of representation in movements leading those mobilisations (Rocheleau *et al.* 1996; Icaza, Newell and Saguier 2010). However, the main body of literature on energy justice fails to adequately consider these intersecting inequalities (Sovacool *et al.* 2023). Gender, in particular, has only tentatively been explored in just energy transitions literature, especially around gendered divisions in decision-making (Boss *et al.* 2023; Nayak and Swain 2023; Walk *et al.* 2021).

Emerging work on energy transitions shows race, gender, class, and ability to be key in terms of who is impacted and how by energy policy interventions (Hooper *et al.* 2021; Newell 2005; see also McCauley, Grant and Mwathunga’s (2022) work on achieving energy justice in Malawi). Many assumptions built into models of social acceptance, uptake and use of energy technologies and infrastructure do not stand up to scrutiny. The relevance of these different social cleavages depends on the energy transition in question, raising an important issue for us about which transitions we are talking about. For example, there may be greater scope for citizen voice and greater impact of mobilisation and more spaces to engage with decision-making on transportation in particular cities and regions, around cooking programmes, or specific heating and cooling initiatives, when compared with trying to influence the high politics of power sector reform or decisions about major infrastructures. For example, women surveyed in Lagos and Imo state in Nigeria were found to have decision-making authority over energy choices, but not over ownership of appliances (Global Subsidies Initiative–IISD & Spaces for Change 2020). The same study found that fuel subsidies in Nigeria are not working well for poor women. Around ‘electric cooking’ transitions, gender blindness has slowed progress in helping poor households transition away from indoor cooking with biomass and its attendant health impacts (Newell and Daley 2022).

Depending on the sector and policy area, some social cleavages (race, gender, and class in particular) become more relevant. Mohr (2021) explores the climate–gender nexus in relation to the Colombian coal sector. Representation and participation of women in climate policy spaces in Colombia is limited due to social structures. There are also issues around the lack of integration of cultural specificities of the territories into decision-making processes (both in relation to mining but also to renewable energy projects) (*ibid.*: 10). The paper analyses how imminent national-level climate policies for the coal sector can be made gender-responsive and thus contribute to a just transition, showing that women in Colombia (especially Afro-Colombian and indigenous women) are already important change agents at the local level and in informal decision-making spaces. Without the integration of gender into planning and implementation, the just transition risks multiplying existing inequalities. The national planning of energy access in many countries often falls under the Ministry of Energy, while the issues of gender equality and wellbeing often fall under the Ministry of Health or Labour. This means that ‘the technical infrastructure of energy access is often discussed and planned without due consideration of gender issues’ (Newell and Daley 2022: 4).

Mohr (2021) also highlights a discrepancy between policy spheres at the national level, i.e. in Bogota, and the local level, i.e. the communities in the coal regions. Climate policy at the national level is strongly influenced by the international climate regime (mitigation efforts and adaptation measures) and the central role of government; whereas, in the coal regions, the climate discussion is inserted in a much broader context of the engagement against the impacts of coal mining, and the protection and defence of the territory seems to take priority, regardless of whether the damages stem from coal mining or the climate crisis (Mohr 2021: 11). This means that insisting on a just transition driven solely by climate change considerations may be interpreted as greenwashing if the needs of local communities are not meaningfully addressed.

For reasons of institutional fragility, conflict, violence, and closing civic space, some contexts are generally more challenging than others. Key findings have emerged from the work of the Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) research programme, for example, about how citizen-led social and political action has contributed to empowerment and accountability in more difficult settings (Anderson 2022a). In many of these contexts, ‘Closing civic space and increasing authoritarianism combine with legacies of fear and self-censorship to limit opportunities for citizen voice’ (*ibid.*: 6). Many fragile contexts have a common backdrop of mistrust in and fear of authorities, linked to legacies of violence, conflict and authoritarian approaches to governance and reinforced by current repression of opposing voices (Anderson 2022a). Hence, fear and distrust are interlinked and affect the potential for citizen voice and agency.

A4EA research in Mozambique into the impact of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI),

found that citizens do not believe that protesting or criticising the government will actually make a difference to their daily lives, so even if they are given information about corruption, for example, they choose not to act on it, as they don't believe their action can change it.

(Awortwi and Nuvunga 2019: 20, cited in Gaventa and Oswald 2019: 7)

In Nigeria, fossil fuel subsidy reform has always been a contentious issue, with many Nigerians seeing subsidies as one of the only benefits that the government provides. One of the key issues is the lack of trust by citizens that the Nigerian government would be able to carry out subsidy reforms effectively and equitably, especially given the influence and power of special interest groups and lobbyists (Gençsü *et al.* 2022: 32). The distrust of government extends to discussions of a just transition. For example, in 2017, a discussion on what transition means for Nigeria was started by Nigeria's labour movement and civil society.

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth (ERA/FOE) Nigeria and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) held several stakeholder workshops (including government, local labour union organisations, local CSOs, host communities, academics, protestors, and workers) focusing on just transition for the petroleum and agriculture sectors in specific states (Ojo and Mustapha 2019). The study found that there was generally low knowledge about climate change and just transition in both sectors, but that the concept was largely embraced due to its potential value to better their lives, jobs, and wages. However, a lack of trust (in government, oil and gas companies, and community leaders) and scepticism of the just transition were common themes that ran through discussions, especially from members of host communities (Ojo and Mustapha 2019: 66).

Taking a 'citizen-eye' view, findings from A4EA also point to the importance of non-state actors and authorities in fragile contexts where authority is often highly fragmented and state authority contested (Anderson 2022a, 2022b).

Marginalised groups in particular may confer authority and trust on other informal actors and channels, and intermediaries can often play a key role in these citizens' 'everyday governance' in these settings (Anderson 2022b). For example, in Mozambique 'the community-based Mualadzi Development and Natural Resources Management Committee emerged as an alternative interlocutor to solve day-to-day problems of people in the community, including access to health and security services' (Gaventa and Oswald 2019: 9).

Cultural expressions of dissent are also important forms of social and political action in settings of repression and closing civic space (Anderson *et al.* 2022a). An exploration of a series of fuel price-related protests during the period 2007–17 in Mozambique as part of A4EA, highlights how informal channels and ways of expression were used for political voice (Hossain *et al.* 2021). Rising access to

information communications technologies and new digital public space also featured. Using popular forms of media (such as hip hop and mobile phone ringtones) to amplify protest messages appeared to have been important and 'Popular culture was an important means of mobilising public opinion and galvanising protest' e.g. through the songs of the critically acclaimed Mozambican artist, Azagaia (Hossain *et al.* 2018: 25). Transport (specifically the *chapas* (minibuses)) were an important theme in the grievances and organisational space around which energy protests emerged (Hossain *et al.* 2018: 26). Hence, in Mozambique, the significance of popular music in amplifying or crystallising popular concerns and reaching different social groups and generations are important in understanding popular politics. Manhiça *et al.* (2020) analyse protest songs in Mozambique between 1998 and 2018 finding indicators of empowerment and accountability in the songs surveyed, expressing awareness of political and economic positions in relation to political and administrative authorities. They also found that CSOs in Mozambique have turned to popular musicians to promote and animate public debates on awareness of citizen's rights and accountability in the past few decades. Concluding that the protest song in Mozambique is a vehicle for popular engagements with the state (*ibid.*: 4). A4EA research demonstrates the importance of cultural expressions as signals of political feeling, grievances, and conflict (Gaventa and Oswald 2019: 17; Manhiça *et al.* 2020).

What these examples point to is the potential for debates about just energy transitions to serve as lightning rods for a series of related and unrelated and often deeper underlying grievances around gendered, class, or racialised inequalities and exclusions from systems of provision of which energy is just one, which need to be understood and navigated.

## 2.3 Spaces

Spaces can mean several things and take a number of forms. Emphasising spatiality is often a way to explore how issues or resources move (or are moved) across sites and scales of politics. But it can also refer to opportunities and openings for change (spaces for change) as with the 'power cube' introduced above (Gaventa 2006). This helps to identify and engage with the interrelationships between spaces, levels, and forms of power, and in doing so, offers a useful framework for civil society actors to strategically 'begin to assess the possibilities of transformative action in various political spaces' (*ibid.*: 25). Spaces for participation are often differentiated between those which are **closed** (not open to citizen engagement), **invited** (and often controlled by powerful actors such as states, corporations, or donors) and those which are **claimed** (whereby citizens demand new spaces of participation or construct alternative sites and spaces of representation and participation) (Cornwall and Gaventa

2001; Cornwall and Coelho 2006). This is ‘where social actors reject hegemonic space and create spaces for themselves’ (Gaventa 2006: 27).

### 2.3.1 The historical and political constitution of energy spaces

Spaces, therefore, are imbued with power and history and are not neutral arenas where actors encounter one another to discuss energy transitions. Spaces of participation are part of broader energy landscapes which,

bring together the state-led political project of producing infrastructure in specific places over time with everyday practices relating to, and potentially challenging or resisting, these unfolding projects. If energy landscapes can capture the ways in which energy resources engage with spaces and the political economy of places, both near and far, then they can also be used to interrogate the dynamics of power inherent in these landscapes. Using energy landscapes as a lens can reveal political challenges as well as political opportunities for promoting change.

(Kirshner, Broto and Baptista 2020: 1067)

Regarding the Cahora Bassa dam and coal operations in Moatize and Tete, Tete province, Mozambique, Kirshner *et al.* suggest that ‘many ordinary Mozambicans see little benefit from the Cahora Bassa dam’s productive power or from the potential wealth generated through extractive coal operations in Moatize’ (2020: 1066). A high proportion of the Cahora Bassa dam output is exported to South Africa (with some being re-imported back to Mozambique via lines owned by Eksom). The town Vila de Songo, located close to the dam managed by the company Hidroelectrica de Cahora Bassa, operates as an enclave that is more closely attached to South Africa’s economy than to Mozambique’s, and reflects ‘the prioritization of specific strategic sites and population groups’ by the Mozambican ruling party (*ibid.*: 1067). In Tete, despite the initial promise of a resource boom from coal, many residents feel excluded from operations and benefits as mining companies have mostly imported skilled labour and local villages remain largely disconnected from electricity access. Hundreds of households have also been displaced by coal mega-projects, ‘with the process lacking transparency and public deliberation’ (HRW 2013 cited in Kirshner *et al.* 2020: 1063); there are limited civic groups in the area and protests about conditions have been met with police repression, such as in 2012 (Kirshner *et al.* 2020: 1063).

Another example is local reactions to the only grid-connected wind park in Colombia (to date), which is located in indigenous territory in La Guajira. The park has set a negative precedent for renewable energy infrastructures in La Guajira by disrupting Wayúu ancestral territories and triggering controversy over

(a lack of) consultation processes, leading to Wayúu communities interrupting the operations or even destroying equipment (Vega-Araújo and Heffron 2022: 2). There have also been reports of militarisation of wind parks in the La Guajira region by the government ‘to guarantee the safety of the inhabitants of La Guajira as well as the “strategic assets of the State” (Ejército Nacional de Colombia 2022)’ (Ramírez, Velázquez and Vélez-Zapata 2022: 9). It is planned that La Guajira will host nine out of the 14 renewable projects awarded in recent power auctions in Colombia, with most of these projects projected to be in indigenous territories (Vega-Araújo and Heffron 2022: 2).

The patterns of exclusion and limited spaces for citizen engagement often have deep historical roots. For example, Namaganda, Otsuki and Steel (2022) draw on African critical theory (ACT) to examine several ways in which the challenges presented by the LNG project in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique are reminiscent of or rooted in colonial extractivism, in particular the associated displacement and resettlement of communities. They argue that the experiences of communities affected by LNG-induced displacement and resettlement in Cabo Delgado must be more historically analysed and deeply contextualised than at a project level to fully understand the impacts. These impacts are ‘inextricable from the colonial history of Mozambique, including its remnants in the socioeconomic and political situation of the country’ (*ibid.*: 7). Through applying ACT to their fieldwork results in Cabo Delgado, Namaganda *et al.* highlight four ways in which some of the challenges presented by contemporary extractivism are similar to those witnessed during colonial extractivism:

the creation and/or reinforcement of socioeconomic imbalances; the weak link between the extractive projects and human development in their host communities; involuntary displacement of communities from their land and livelihoods; and a high likelihood to instigate various forms of conflict.

(*ibid.*: 7)

They argue for revisiting some of the ‘progressive policies of various African countries’ anti-colonial and early post-independence periods, which are likely to offer us a useful starting point for reflecting upon how to centre local realities and development aspirations in contemporary resource extraction developments’ and transitions (*ibid.*: 7).

Spatial and temporal energy injustices are closely linked, circumscribing the scope for just transitions. Kirshner *et al.* suggest, ‘The political economy of energy in Mozambique is intermingled with the spatiality of the country’s energy systems, their historical legacies and prospective futures’ (2020: 1052). Mozambique’s energy landscape and the expansion of its electricity grid is conditioned by a history of uneven distribution (Lesutis 2019a, 2019b). Only about 30 per cent of Mozambique’s population have access to electricity



(Global Energy Monitor 2023), and this masks significant divergence between rural areas and urban areas (Castán Broto *et al.* 2018: 648). Energy policy in Mozambique reflects spatial and social inequalities. Kirshner *et al.* (2020: 1052) argue that ‘the Mozambican state’s efforts to knit together its territory through energy provision have served to heighten divisions between urban and rural areas, subnational regions and socioeconomic groups.’ Mozambique is also a major exporter of hydropower, coal, and natural gas; much of the gas from new projects is not destined for domestic consumption (Global Energy Monitor 2023). This places ‘deserving ‘recipients’ of energy expansion (businesses, consumers) in conflict with the needs of the majority of the population’ while excluding models of collective ownership that are potentially more sustainable and democratic than the profit-led models of energy transition (Castán Broto *et al.* 2018: 654). Despite a strong tradition of active participation of citizens in service provision, ‘energy institutions have remained remarkably opaque’ in Mozambique with a track-record of a lack of accountability and limited success in service delivery and the persistence of injustices. ‘Recipients of grid and off-grid extensions have been created while an even greater number have been excluded through the ways in [which] policies are implemented’ (*ibid.*: 654).

### 2.3.2 The challenge of constrained civic space

When it comes to governance in the context of the energy transition, restrictions on civic freedoms increase the likelihood that transitions to a low- or zero-carbon future will be elite-dominated, without significant public participation, consideration of impacts on local communities, or efforts to promote equity, justice, and sustainable development. A key challenge is that where this is most needed – in poorer fossil fuel-dependent economies – is also where civic space for citizens to participate in energy decision-making and deliberate on these trade-offs is least accessible to communities on the ground.

Across the world, a broad and well-evidenced consensus now exists that civic space is under attack and shrinking. This long-running trend over at least the past 15 years is observed not only in non-OECD settings but also in countries of the global North, as highlighted in stark terms in a series of landmark publications from the major analysts of civic space and civil society over the past three years. As one recent report put it:

The rise of a global climate movement has been accompanied by a crackdown on civic space for climate activists worldwide. As climate strikes, protests, and mass mobilization become more widespread, many governments have teamed up with private actors to quell climate activism. This suppression has taken many forms, from laws criminalizing legitimate expression and assembly, to attempts to paint



activists as ‘eco-terrorists’, to civil lawsuits and physical persecution.  
(ICNL 2020: 1)

As part of this trend, a certain repertoire or playbook of repressive tactics has become familiar to those monitoring civic space and the related freedoms of assembly, expression, and association. Central among these are formal and legal restrictions and regulations on organisations, including the legal right of civic organisations to exist independently of government at all, curtailment of their income and activities, and intrusive state supervision. Restrictions on freedom of speech, press freedom, access to information and communication have increased and, simultaneous with the expansion of digital forms of expression, have been supplemented with surveillance of online spaces. The number of activists and CSOs targeted with individual harassment, persecution, or violence has risen steadily, including malicious prosecution and measures as extreme as physical assaults and even assassination.

In numerous settings civil society has been subject to concerted attempts to divide, fragment and co-opt it, and to stigmatise it through negative labelling, and the crafting and propagation of anti-CSO discourses including in some of the world’s largest democracies such as India. Though increasingly widespread across the world, resort to these repressive tactics is particularly common among regimes that are reliant on extractive industries for the revenue needed to keep elites on side and maintain the basic welfare provision that underpins the social contract with citizens – often including provision of fuel for transport, cooking, and small generators at subsidised prices. To some extent, this social contract has come under renewed strain under the Covid-19 pandemic under conditions of a ‘governance shock doctrine’. As McGee suggests,

Measures adopted in emergency situations tend to persist, threatening to lock civil society into living with pandemic-era restrictions. Preventing this should be a global priority, and especially important where authoritarianism already looms. An energetic mobilization among national and international actors to reassert and protect civic space is needed.  
(2022: 1)

Problematically, this shrinking of civic space often intersects with and intensifies the gender backlash, which is particularly impactful for women’s rights and gender justice activism (Chopra 2021).

Political power in these countries tends to be centralised, arbitrary, and discretionary, and marked by corruption, elite capture, and clientelism. Resentment at the centralisation of power and unequal distribution of resource revenues can fuel protests and even armed insurgencies in producer regions, such as Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, leading in turn to increasingly repressive

action by the central government. With formal democratic institutions weakened or captured by elite interference, calls for transparency are likely to go unheeded or meet with repression; as a result, the normal routes by which citizens might demand accountability from corporate sector actors or government are often hard to access, dysfunctional, or mired in threat and danger. Lacking access to dialogue spaces or invitations to contribute to shaping policy related to climate change or energy transition, citizens, and civil society actors are often finding that protests and direct action are their only option, despite the risks that these entail.

### 2.3.3 The peculiar politics of energy

While the trend towards closing civic space is a general one, it is more severe in policy areas that are known to be especially undemocratic and closed to public engagement or participatory deliberation – chief among which is energy policy. Debates on energy policy in resource-rich countries have historically been closed spaces, with little pretence of citizen engagement, compared to policy areas such as poverty reduction or social policy, where at least some attempts have been made in the past to encourage public participation. The political sensitivity of energy policy – heightened by the growth in recent years in the frequency and intensity of fuel price protests, which in some cases have even led to regime change – has made governments especially wary of engaging with citizens and civil society in debates over energy justice. The closure of civic space is an even greater challenge for the field of energy policy, where there was little openness to public deliberation even before the current wave of democratic backsliding began.

Hence, there are both generic challenges to civic participation and engagement in public life and ones that are specific to, or at least intensified, in the arena of energy politics. This is because of the high stakes and sensitivities around any discussion of moving away from or forgoing the possibility of extracting resources of significant value. The argument of oil- and gas-producing countries in Africa and elsewhere in the global South that they have the right to harness their fossil fuel resources to support their own development resonates with global justice claims – including many declarations by African civil society groups who are critical of ‘colonial’ and ‘hypocritical’ Western calls for decarbonisation. But it has also been exploited by corporate interests who are lobbying against divestment from oil and gas and for the maintenance of business as usual. Or for the use of gas as a ‘transition fuel’, as is the case in the Federal Government of Nigeria’s Energy Transition Plan, despite fears this may risk locking the country into a longer-term fossil fuel dependency (Gençsü *et al.* 2022: 32). One consequence of these North–South tensions has been to expose local activists arguing against the exploitation of natural resources to government accusations of being ‘unpatriotic’ or overly influenced by Western agendas.

Local and national initiatives are attracting growing interest from international NGOs working on the governance of extractive industries who are increasingly taking up just transition issues, including the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI), Oxfam America, the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, and many more. For example, in Ghana, the Alliance of CSOs Working on Extractives, Anti-Corruption and Good Governance has successfully evolved to work with the new National Energy Transition Committee, calling for more inclusive and open dialogue on Ghana's energy transition journey (Kaimal and Newell 2022). There are also at least two significant global multistakeholder initiatives with either majority (EITI) or significant (Open Government Partnership) African membership and considerable stakes in these issues. Nigeria and Colombia are members of both EITI and the Open Government Partnership. These initiatives offer opportunities for international NGOs and government reformers to help to open space for citizen voices to be heard in global policy processes, while also offering the domestic visibility that engagement with global spaces often brings. Yet while there are growing numbers of environmental, trade union, extractives governance and human rights organisations which potentially could help to create or hold open space for more inclusive dialogue on just transition issues, there are significant disconnects between the levels and across the spectrum of issues.

The most effective strategies are those that acknowledge the need for government development planning, civil society transparency and accountability work and corporate social responsibility programmes to include engagement with local communities on their own terms, moving beyond 'consultation as usual' in a way that respects very different local logics of rights and representation. These are often brokered at an international level. Innovative strategies for brokering inclusive dialogue around energy policy and transition have begun to emerge at different levels. For instance, in 2017, CIVICUS together with Publish What You Pay facilitated engagements between activists working on environmental, land and indigenous rights around the world, including in Africa, with the relevant UN mechanisms and governments (PWYP 2017). Previous research has indicated that the success of such strategies depends on effective mediation and inclusive representation – whether by community leaders or civil society groups – across a series of spaces at different levels – local, national, regional, and global – that are shaped by different kinds of power relations.

## 2.4 Alliances

Given the challenges of either using invited spaces effectively or of claiming spaces and of amplifying women's, indigenous, non-white, and other excluded citizen voices in just transition debates, what do we know about how alliances can be formed to centre justice issues in transition debates through collective organising and mobilisation?

There are growing numbers of environmental, trade union, extractives governance and human rights organisations that are engaging with just transition issues in a diversity of ways that could potentially help to create or hold open space for more inclusive dialogues on energy futures. Despite the shrinking of civic space in many regions, this is an area of intensifying advocacy on the part of a wide and growing range of CSOs working on the governance of natural resources, climate activism, monitoring of extractive industries, and defence of human rights and environmental defenders at global and country levels (Cheon and Urpelainen 2017). Across many regions, including those of most concern to this project, there is a growing environmental movement, which, along with trade unions, feminist and indigenous organisations has the potential to play a positive role in amplifying the voices of communities on the frontlines of energy transition in local, national, and global debates. Yet, as in many campaigns and social movements, there are often disconnects between local, national, and global groups, raising questions of legitimacy about who speaks for whom in which fora when energy policymaking is multi-scalar and multi-sited and crosses so many sectors, calling for horizontal alliances between a plethora of movements. Within these movements, there may be deep divisions between those organisations who want to ‘leave fossil fuels in the ground’ for environmental reasons, and those who advocate for a slower rate of withdrawal from oil and gas production, emphasising the need to capture benefits especially for developing countries grounded in claims of rights to development and significantly reduced historical responsibility for depleting carbon budgets to date.

#### **2.4.1 Issues of power imbalances, scale, access, and trust**

There is an extensive literature on social movement mobilisation around issues which pertain directly and indirectly to just transitions: land, labour, resources, and trade. Within International Relations and scholarship on global social movements (Cohen and Rai 2000), there is a lot of work on transnational mobilisation (Tarrow 2005). This explores questions of who can access global policy spaces on whose behalf and who gets to speak for transnational alliances (O’Brien *et al.* 2000; Icaza *et al.* 2010). The impact of transnational social movement organising is of course relational and can be countered by mobile and well-resourced corporate actors (Clapp and Fuchs 2009) who are also able to engage in ‘forum-shifting’ to ensure issues are dealt with in institutional spaces more sympathetic to their concerns (Sell 2003; Braithwaite and Drahos 2000). We can observe this dynamic in struggles over the Energy Charter Treaty which has been used by energy majors to contest national-level transition plans in the Netherlands (over coal) and the US (over the XL pipeline) for example, but where social pressure has now led many European governments to leave the treaty arrangement (Tienhaara *et al.* 2022).

There is also uneven access for civil society groups across different global governance institutions active on the issue of just transitions such as the ILO, World Bank, IMF, UNCTAD, and IRENA. Trade unions are well represented in the ILO and to a lesser extent UNCTAD, but less so in the World Bank and IMF. Some 'insider' environmental groups (such as Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC)) have relatively good access to the World Bank, but weaker ties to the ILO and IMF. Just as powerful actors seek to 'forum shift' moving an issue to institutional spaces where they feel they have greater power and representation, so too CSOs seek to ensure issues of just transition are debated and explored in spaces they can access and where they have a presence. As noted in the introduction to the paper, this is the political work of bridging the different spaces where decisions are made about transition trajectories and where justice claims are articulated and processed. It is reflected in the preference of energy majors for using secretive investor tribunals or treaties to resolve disputes (Tienhaara and Newell 2023) and conversely in calls from activists to set standards and resolve conflicts in more multilateral fora where democratic scrutiny and civil society engagement is more possible.

Forming multi-movement alliances is also challenging. Doing so around energy issues where conflicts between labour movements and indigenous, women's, human rights, and environmental movements might be intensified around questions of jobs, access to land and environmental impacts brings additional issues to wrestle with (Obach 2004). Experiences of mobilisation around trade agreements highlight the different bases of representation, protest cultures, demands, modes of decision-making associated with indigenous, labour, gender, and environmental movements (Newell 2007). As well as deeper histories of distrust within and between movements such as between environmental justice movements and mainstream environmental groups (where the latter are accused of not adequately addressing social injustices (Cole and Foster 2002)) or between labour and environmental groups that have emerged around support of the former for potentially high employment but carbon-intensive energy infrastructures (such as power plants and airports) or controversial technologies such as fracking. Digging beneath higher-level differences of ideology and strategy, in reality there is huge diversity within these movements which means that site specific coalitions and alliances are often possible, as examples of just transition experiments in California, Hunter Valley Australia and fracking in the UK illustrate (Evans 2010).

The multiscale nature of energy politics, as well as the barriers that often exist to engagement in closed or repressive local and national settings, mean that civil society is challenged to build coalitions and alliances across levels, issues, and spaces of engagement. This is where resource inequities and differences of political perspective between and within CSOs are significant. NGOs working

largely in national capitals or in regional and international alliances are often better able to participate in elite conversations at national level or in regional and international arenas, whereas lack of resources and technical capacity mean grass-roots organisations often have a strong preference for more local spaces of engagement and deliberation.

#### **2.4.2 Alliance- and coalition-building**

A key challenge for civil society, therefore, is building more effective alliances and coalitions that operate simultaneously across scales so that local actors bearing witness to what is happening on the ground, able to articulate historical experiences and concerns, and having capabilities to contribute to energy planning, can have influence in higher-level spaces where key conversations are taking place. For example, given the lack of local space to safely object to fossil fuel expansion, *Justiça Ambiental* have sought to work with allies in France to contest Total's presence in Mozambique while using their membership of Friends of the Earth International to get the UK office to pressure the UK government and banks such as HSBC that are financing LNG gas projects in the region. This can lend legitimacy to national and global actors wanting to stake a claim to represent a wide range of actors and interests, while providing some solidarity and political cover for actors involved in local struggles. In other words, these forms of activism can change the balance of power because state and corporate actors know that they may not be able to dismiss local concerns as easily if they are plugged into global activist networks (Edwards and Gaventa 2001).

Despite the obstacles to engagement and challenges to working across scales, we do see several examples emerging of promising alliances that have the potential to strengthen and amplify local and national voices in global energy debates. One way in which these alliances are being built is through networks, such as the Global Gas and Oil Network of CSOs working in the sector, or specific campaigns with global representation, such as the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty campaign. The former involves many African CSOs, such as the Kenya-based Power Shift Africa, working alongside Northern-based NGOs such as Global Witness, Greenpeace, Oil Change International, and Friends of the Earth, while the latter brings together indigenous, labour, feminist, human rights, environment and development groups the world over including dozens of organisations in both Nigeria and Colombia (The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty n.d.).

Some such coalition-building is focused on disrupting industrial incumbents' influence over the political system. This aims to challenge the political power of the 'polluter elite', and not just their investment power or direct emissions associated with high-carbon living (Kenner 2019), through exposure work and



advocacy for greater regulation and transparency around lobbying, representation, party donations, and the like. It focuses on cleaning up the governance of party donations, the ‘revolving doors’ which operate between businesses and the state officials who are meant to regulate them, internships which grant powerful actors privileged access to government decision-making, and disproportionate representation on key decision-making bodies. The work of activist organisations such as the Corporate European Observatory and DeSmog is particularly important here, but it resonates with issues raised and strategies used by groups such as S4C Nigeria and Power Shift Africa aimed at exposing collusion and corruption in the energy sector. In more formal arenas, PWYP, the Open Governance Partnership, and EITI can enhance and enable this type of activism across scales. Though on one level its focus is the traditional terrain of good governance and open government, more fundamentally it can seek to limit the role of money in politics as well as shift power relations around who gets to make energy policy and on whose behalf.

Bilateral donor agencies and multilateral actors have a key potential role to play in supporting coalitions to strengthen the voices of people from Africa’s oil and gas-producing regions in global transition debates and energy policy processes. There are several regional, bilateral, and multilateral funding organisations active in the region that could help to enable the creation and protection of civic spaces by defining them as a requirement or precondition for the funds they provide for energy projects and related infrastructure. There are, nevertheless, differences of opinion about the weight that should be given to just transition issues and the extent to which ‘process conditionalities’ around transparency, participation, and accountability are either appropriate (when they can be construed as being a form of Western interference in a country’s internal affairs) or effective. Given the number of alternative investors (from China or the Middle East, for example) that do not insist on compliance with these process-related criteria and place a greater emphasis on the sovereignty of governments, there is a danger that imposing conditionalities of this kind could simply drive disengagement from the funding agencies that applied them.

### **2.4.3 From local to global**

Other attempts at alliance-building start local (or regional) and build outwards. A useful example in this regard is the role of CSOs and civil society alliances in the Appalachian Mountains in the US to mitigate the decline of the coal industry (Hess, McKane and Belletto 2021; Taylor, Hufford and Bilbrey 2017; Abraham 2017). This area has a long history of social movements in which environmental and social justice are intertwined and place-based. Where government support for a just transition is weak, opposed or co-opted, such as in Central Appalachia, leadership efforts to build a more just regional economy has fallen largely on CSOs (Hess *et al.* 2021: 4). CSOs in Central Appalachia have provided a vision,



demonstration projects and support for political and policy reform, helping to define and motivate what a just transition regionally could look like and strengthening political will in the communities in need of just transition. Gender is another element of this coalition-building in Central Appalachia, as these visions for alternative economies to coal have largely been led by women who were integral to union struggles, despite coal mining itself largely excluding women and relying on masculine identities (Smith 2015). Smith (2015) argues that these historic gendered divisions of labour, identity, and geography persist in the future-of-coal discourse and the region's social imaginary. Another example is the 16-member regional coalition of grass-roots leaders Alliance for Appalachia, which emerged in the early 2000s and who have been active in addressing both the challenge of environmental justice and post-coal economic transition using forms of local knowledge and commons governance to reclaim power (Taylor *et al.* 2017).

Often such campaigning serves to globalise localised resource struggles. Campaigns against the oil producers Chevron and Texaco for their role in extracting resources from contested land in Ecuador provide one example. A report about Texaco's operations in Ecuador as far back as the 1980s documented that 3.2 million gallons of toxic waste were being spilled from the company's operations every day. Subsequent legal battles have taken on international dimensions, with US legal activists working with indigenous peoples' groups against the Government of Ecuador, which was anxious not to scare off would-be oil investment (Kimerling 1996). The company faced a class action suit in the US and consumer boycotts organised by Acción Ecológica and Rainforest Action Network. In June 1994, Ecuador's 12 indigenous peoples' groups united to shut down the whole country for two weeks.

Another oil-related case is that of Oxy and the U'wa people of Colombia, threatening mass suicide if Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum was allowed to go ahead with plans, developed in 1995, to drill for oil on U'wa land (Izquierdo 2001). Highlighting the importance of identity politics to justice claims-making, the U'wa people issued a declaration stating, 'we would rather die, protecting everything we hold sacred rather than lose everything that makes us U'wa'. Rights enshrined in legal conventions combined with communication technologies that enable communities at the frontline of these forms of resistance to be in touch with groups sympathetic to their aims has created a public relations nightmare for firms hoping to contain localised conflicts with groups whose resources they are seeking to exploit. For example, Amazon Watch and Action Resource Centre organised a non-violent direct action against Occidental's headquarters in Los Angeles when protesters 'installed' a 23-foot mock pipeline in Occidental's lobby. Foreign-owned transnationals such as Occidental and Shell are often more vulnerable to indigenous activism than Latin American state-owned companies, such as CVG-EDELCA in Venezuela, since

they are more sensitive to global publics and more likely to be influenced by transnational organising (Garvey and Newell 2004).

When activists around the world aligned themselves in support of the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, they showed how site-specific struggles for social and environmental justice could be globalised (Okonta and Douglas 2001; Frynas 1999). The oil company Shell was drawn into a global controversy about its operations in the region, subject to boycotts, shareholder activism and other tactics aimed at questioning its activities in Nigeria. This example also points to how framings and issues change as they move across scales and are mediated by different campaigning priorities. Whereas some of the key drivers of the struggle in Nigeria were around resource deprivation, they were presented as human rights issues by groups such as Amnesty International and as being about environmental degradation by groups such as Greenpeace in Europe and elsewhere. Messaging in different ways to different audiences is clearly part of building multisectoral alliances, but this dynamic does raise issues of voice and representation within civil society in the context of sharp resource inequalities to ensure that the justice issues and grievances that animate local struggles get properly attended to.

#### **2.4.4 Issues of representation**

NGOs and unions can perform representational functions in these settings, though questions about their own accountability immediately arise. In several cases, the involvement of NGOs has served to reduce the responsiveness of corporations to community campaigns. For example, the Western Mining Corporation was able to use the fact that several 'external' environmental groups, including the Conservation Council and Friends of the Earth, were closely involved with aboriginal opponents of the development of the Olympic Dam mine in South Australia to question the legitimacy of the campaign. The company objected to negotiating with groups on the basis that they were 'cronies' of the environmental NGOs, even though the majority of the community representatives favoured the NGOs' stance on the mine (Ali 2000: 88). There are also issues of how inclusive NGOs are of different elements of a local population on whose behalf they are bargaining. In Wavecrest, South Africa, opposition to a proposed heavy mineral mine came both from within the affected Xhosa groups within the area and from the Wildlife and Environment Society, a national NGO (Hamann 2001). While the community position on the mine was divided, in its campaign against the proposed development – to which community opposition gave credibility and legitimacy – Hamman claims that the NGO presented a misleading image of a community united against the mine (Hamann 2001). Thus, there is a balance to strike between the benefits and risks of NGO involvement in community campaigns.

These examples point to the complexity of representation, especially in the context of a 'national' civil society that is riven with political fissures that are the legacy of civic conflict in places like Colombia; and to a different extent, Nigeria. In Colombia, deep fissures in civil society result from six decades of violent civil conflict and a protracted and incomplete peace process which can fragment civil society and militate against successful, impactful alliance-building. Likewise in Nigeria, insistence on numerical representation of all six regions to maintain a semblance of regional-political balance in an artificially constituted 'nation' where sectarian and political polarisation is huge and deepening, highlights other challenges of indirect representation where existing divisions can be weaponised in the context of contentious resource and energy politics.

Issues of inclusive representation in multisectoral and multi-scale alliances are particularly acute for indigenous groups. Environmental justice literatures often emphasise the different cultures of protest that poorer groups bring to environmental politics – a distrust of institutions and the law that is reflected in self-help strategies of protest and resistance (Cole and Foster 2002). This is apparent in the Latin American context where Philip Oxhorn is right to claim that,

in many ways, indigenous movements present the most fundamental challenges for understanding the quality of democratic regimes and for theories of social movements. Their distinctly non-Western experience, history of violent abuse, and understanding of rights in collective rather than liberal individualist terms all seem to set them apart from other movements, and perhaps even from the context of civil society in which they are frequently placed.

(Oxhorn 2001: 174)

Claims about transnational representation in such alliance-building are often difficult to verify in practice. Claims of transnationality often derive from the fact that alliances have members in many different countries that subscribe to the basic position of the organisation. The outward appearance of mega-coalitions of transnationally organised activities often betrays the reality of small but tightly organised offices with exceptionally good global connections. Moreover, the ties that sustain networks such as this are more often than not personal relationships rather than formal or regular interorganisational collaborations (Newell 2008). Tarrow (2005) claims that much activism that is called transnational is often actually the global expression of demands articulated in a particular national setting and intended to shift the position of a specific nation state. What we often see is the emergence of 'focal points', moments or spaces of political convergence in which diverse national priorities, campaigning emphases, and strategic preferences can be expressed. These can take the form of a 'discourse coalition' (Hajer 1995) or serve as a narrative that unites eclectic movements across different territories, a malleable storyline or device that works in different

settings and therefore allows for the political buy-in of groups that might not otherwise work together.

#### **2.4.5 Mobilisations against energy transitions**

It is also worth noting the growing role of mobilisations and alliance-building aimed at slowing and disrupting energy transitions. There is a great deal of citizen engagement against transitions, albeit sometimes orchestrated by incumbent actors (Supran and Oresekes 2021). Indeed, it is often the case that the more ambitious forthcoming climate action appears to be, the stronger the resistance. There is engagement from (un)civil society using violence and intimidation against those advocating for bolder climate action, as well as organised resistance in the form of: (i) localised opposition to low-carbon projects such as wind energy farms (Dunlap 2018), sometimes also referred to as NIMBYISM (Not-In-My-Backyard-ism); and (ii) the formation of ‘astro-turf’ groups that appear to raise citizen concerns about climate action but are funded by industry groups seeking to stall action (Rowell 1996; Beder 1997). This can take the form of front groups such as the Information Council on the Environment (Rowell 1996) or, in a more recent manifestation, the rebranding of climate-sceptic groups as ‘watchdog’ NGOs. An example of the latter is the UK’s Net Zero Watch which could easily be mistaken for an activist group monitoring the integrity of net-zero commitments but is in fact a vehicle for pushing back against net-zero policies wherein one of the key strategies is providing a platform for ‘concerned citizens’ about the effect of government climate policies on their wellbeing (Atkins 2022). In the US, meanwhile, the Friends of Coal movement in the US supported the coal industry and closed down possibilities for discussion of just transition at its height (Ryerson 2020). More spontaneously, albeit supported and coordinated behind the scenes, this takes the form of affected groups (such as taxi drivers) self-organising against policies such as congestion charges and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (in London, for example) and building alliances with other (alt)right-wing groups inciting conflict around migration and Covid-19 restrictions.

### 3. Strategies for amplifying voices, creating and accessing spaces for change, and building alliances

Moving beyond the discussion of questions of voice, space, and alliances as they pertain to just transitions, here we look at concrete strategies and intervention points for bringing justice issues into energy transition debates focused on engaging in invited spaces, claiming new spaces, and building new alliances. These can be employed at all stages of the energy policy cycle. They can be anticipatory (around planned projects and the impacts they might have, positive and negative) about redress and restoration (mitigating and cleaning up effects of past extraction) as well as seek to envision (building alternatives and creating economic and social alternatives) (Abramsky 2010).

#### 3.1 Invited spaces

Invited spaces refer to spaces for citizen engagement by actors such as governments, cities, NGOs, or corporations where the terms and nature of the engagement are often set by those actors rather than citizens themselves. They can operate at all levels from local to global and cover a spectrum from more the regularised, institutionalised, and ongoing to more transient and time-bound consultations (Powercube n.d.-b).

**National referendums:** Though governments rarely put questions of national importance around energy to popular votes, it does happen occasionally. Switzerland is a country known for both frequent referenda on a range of political matters and a strong track record on environmental issues. Yet, in a set-back to their climate ambition, voters rejected measures which they thought might impede the country's economic recovery. Writing for the BBC, Imogen Foulkes noted,

The no-vote to limiting emissions is a huge shock. The Swiss government drafted this law carefully. The plan: to cut greenhouse gases to half their 1990 levels by 2030, using a combination of more renewables and taxes on fossil fuels. Voter rejection undermines Switzerland's entire strategy to comply with the Paris Agreement. Today's results are a devastating blow for environmentalists. (Foulkes 2021: para. 9–10)

In another example, Ecuador's Constitutional Court issued a decision in May 2023 approving a national referendum on whether to keep the country's largest

oil fields permanently in the ground. The ITT (Ishpingo, Tambococha, Tiputini) fields lie beneath Yasuni National Park, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) biosphere reserve and home to indigenous peoples and the focus of the famous and subsequently stalled initiative to leave oil in the ground in exchange for compensation from the international community for foregone revenues. The government had 75 days to put the question, 'Do you agree that the government keeps the oil in ITT, known as block 43, permanently in the ground?' to voters in a referendum scheduled to take place in August 2023. The court decision would not only require no new wells, no new contracts, but also the gradual closing of all wells and removal of all infrastructure. The case was filed in 2014 by representatives of Yasunidos collective who gathered more than 800,000 signatures (twice the number needed) to qualify the question for a vote. But the government at the time illegally disqualified almost 500,000 signatures, denying Yasunidos plaintiffs right to democratic participation, which was recognised by the court in this latest decision (CCE 2023). This time Ecuador's electoral court validated over 750,000 signatures that been collected in support of a referendum. The referendum has now taken place and after an effective mobilisation 58 per cent of those who voted gave their support to the proposal to protect the reserve and leave the oil in the ground.

**National advisory panels:** At the national level, Costa Rica's Citizen's Climate Change Advisory Council offers one model of how to engage citizens directly in policy. The Citizens' Advisory Council on Climate Change, also known as 5C, was created in 2018 by the Costa Rican Ministry of the Environment and Energy in fulfilment of one of its commitments under the Paris Agreement. The Council is made up of representatives of a cross-section of civil society, indigenous, business, and trade union groups that are engaged with the climate issue. The purpose of the Council is to become a deliberative space that advises the Ministry of Environment and Energy on issues related to climate change. In turn, the Ministry, along with other government entities, may submit to the Council consultations on the design, implementation and evaluation of their climate policies, programmes, and metrics. The Council then monitors the implementation of the National Determined Contribution presented by Costa Rica to the Conference of the Parties and the UN SDGs related to climate change and its effects. Although participants are selected, the council meets regularly, and this is described as a form of 'co-governance' where through such democratic innovations 'non-binding decisions' result (Latinno 2023).

**Panels and commissions dealing with energy issues:** Germany's coal transition is a key reference point in debates about just transitions (Brauers *et al.* 2018; Arora and Schroeder 2022; Campbell and Coenen 2017; Oei, Brauers and Herpich 2019). Initially the government adopted policies that were designed to benefit a large voter constituency – the increasingly insecure and dissatisfied workers – and a few wealthy industrialists. But the top-down manner in which the



policies were carried out exacerbated many of the structural challenges facing the region and allowed coalitions of resistance to form around key junctures of policy. Over time, policymakers pursued a more bottom-up approach, incorporating citizen voices and local actors' participation into the decision-making process (Dahlbeck and Gärtner 2019).

The Ruhr Action Programme (Aktionsprogramm Ruhr, APR) was launched to bring together the various largest stakeholders and interest groups, as well as federal and state government, to help coordinate and shape policy and investment to stimulate the economic transition in the Ruhr Valley (Galgóczy 2014). In 1987, the state government sought to broaden the range of stakeholders engaged by setting up a Coal Roundtable (*Kohlerunde*), where impacted social partners could gather to discuss viable pathways to phasing out the coal industry through to 1995. Simultaneously developing alongside this roundtable were policies that strengthened political devolution to the local level, where cities were encouraged to create their own policy plans and strategies. This enabled them to find solutions that were both more sustainable and acceptable to the affected communities and the wider public, while pushing ahead with the broader policy aims of economic diversification. Local actors were engaged on local issues to ensure that policy design reflected the lived experience of specific clusters of employment within the Ruhr Valley, which made it far more likely to be supported (Pegels and Lütkenhorst 2014).

In 2007, the German Coal Association (GVSt), the trade union for mining, chemical and energy industries (IG BCE), and the federal and state governments concluded a tripartite agreement that set a final phase-out date for subsidies for hard coal: 31 December 2018 (OECD 2017). It also introduced a broad range of just transition measures to support workers, including staggered mine closures towards 2018 to minimise disruption; measures to ensure alternative employment in other sectors when redundancies were unavoidable, (which over 10,000 employees made use of); an early retirement scheme that compensated younger workers for lost future earnings; opportunities for internal hiring and redeployment, as well as external transition to other sectors (service, transport, manufacturing, etc.); and continued qualifications and accreditations for workers.

Finally, in 2018, the German government brought together 28 members drawn from academic, industry, environmental groups, trade unions, and government to form the German Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment, known more commonly as the Coal Commission (Oczkowska and Pellerin-Carlin 2019).<sup>5</sup> The Commission was given a clear mandate and specific objectives by government and respective ministries. Government actors were allowed to take part in the plenary sessions but not allowed to vote, ensuring that the

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5 For work on the experience of other coal commissions see Gürtler *et al.* (2021) and on other coal transitions see Schulz and Schwartzkopff (2016).



Commission could reach independent recommendations and was insulated from any vested interests within the state. The Commission spent eight months consulting on when to completely phase out coal power and agreed on 2038 at the latest (Newell and Daley 2022). Hence the creation of the German Coal Commission in 2018 was the result of decades worth of experimenting with multistakeholder negotiations, engaging social partners from across the coal regions and learning from the many policy failures. The gathering of organised interests and social partners under the banner of the Coal Commission has helped build public buy-in for transition policies amid what has been a polarised and often stop-start regional transition. The termination of hard coal mining in 2018 came after decades of government-led policy and broad-based stakeholder engagement in Germany's urban and industrial heartland, the Ruhr Valley.

**Citizen assemblies:** There is growing interest in the use of citizen assemblies (CAs)<sup>6</sup> to address the complexity of climate change, in which energy politics inevitably feature centrally (Bryant and Stone 2020). Shehabi and Al-Masri (2022) experimented with a combined democratic-justice approach to energy future-making through a CA on energy justice in Lebanon. Four imaginaries emerged reflecting alienation from official politics and low confidence in the state's ability to deliver a just energy transition. A comparative case study of two processes that ran in the UK in 2019 (the Leeds Climate Change Citizens' Jury and the Oxford Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change) found that the impact of these processes is not uniform across different contexts. They have an indirect impact on policymaking by creating momentum around climate action and supporting the introduction of pre-planned or pre-existing policies, rather than a direct impact by being a truly citizen-centred policymaking process that is conducive to new climate policy (Wells, Howarth and Brand-Correa 2021). The ways in which the proposals emerging from CAs are influenced by the presentation of information and structuring of debates is important to bear in mind when exploring the value of assemblies as a means of citizen engagement (Capstick *et al.* 2020: 1).

In France, the approach to the climate assembly was characterised by: (i) sustained interactions between citizens and the steering board; (ii) a significant input from technical and legal experts; (iii) and a strong emphasis on creating consensus. This resulted in the citizens approving 149 measures, 146 of which President Macron committed to follow up on. Yet as implementation is now under discussion, 'the promise that measures would pass "unfiltered" appears increasingly questioned' (Giraudet *et al.* 2021: 1). In Ireland, the Irish CA and Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action deliberations on climate action has also attracted attention (Devaney *et al.* 2020). Harris (2021: 677)

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6 A CA is a decision-making model where a group of non-expert, randomly selected citizens work to arrive at practical and policy-relevant recommendations in response to complex social issues (Capstick *et al.* 2020: 2).

analysed the extent to which children, young people, and future generations were included in the process by analysing the membership of both institutions, the public submissions to them and the invited expertise presented. Harris found that the Irish CA was ‘too tightly coupled’ to government on this issue and notes that ‘this may have been beneficial in terms of impact, but it came at the expense of input legitimacy and potentially intergenerational justice’ (2021: 677).

Such approaches are not solely confined to the national level as there have been attempts to orchestrate global level deliberations that try and address some of these issues such as the global citizen’s assembly on the climate and ecological crisis (Mellier and Wilson 2023).

**Prior consultations and Free Prior and Informed Consent processes:** Prior consultations and social engagements are undertaken by companies, banks, and donors to build good relationships and establish a (social) licence to operate (SLO) – generally understood as the broad, ongoing acceptance of society (especially local communities) for companies to conduct operations. However, this is not the same as recognising the right of indigenous communities to autonomously consent to or withhold consent for projects. Hence the objectives of FPIC and the concept of SLO can be aligned, but are nevertheless distinct. Although the international recognition of indigenous and tribal peoples’ right to FPIC has been hard won, FPIC in practice as a right and a mechanism to enable and protect indigenous peoples’ rights is far from being realised in many countries (Mebratu-Tsegaye and Kazemi 2020).

For example, Vega-Araújo and Heffron (2022) explore the lack of consultation with indigenous communities around renewable energy projects in La Guajira, Colombia. Specifically, there is an issue around the role of community advisors during community–company negotiation framed in FPIC processes and their critical role in achieving fair compensation schemes. Their role as actors with technical knowledge and expertise is expected to focus on helping the local community to identify project impacts, support awareness of rights, and guarantee fair compensation. ‘Yet, if not closely monitored and regulated, they can undermine energy justice when driven by economic self-interest and the pressure they may resultingly place on communities to reach potentially unfair agreements’ (*ibid.*: 11).

## 3.2 Claimed spaces

Alongside invited spaces of participation and often driven by a frustration with their limited nature, citizens often create their own spaces for participation, especially where they feel excluded, underrepresented, or disenfranchised by the absence or limited nature of spaces into which they are invited. As Gaventa suggests,

These spaces range from ones created by social movements and community associations, to those simply involving natural places where people gather to debate, discuss and resist, outside of the institutionalized policy arenas.

(Powercube n.d.-a: para. 1)

The following are some examples of relevance to energy transitions.

**Citizen juries:** Following a similar model, but a claimed rather than invited space, citizen juries constitute another important way of engaging citizens over transition pathways. They have been used to target small-scale farmers, landless people, and poor urban consumers. These have been used in India and Brazil, for example, to encourage deliberation over different technological futures: a process which could be applied to citizen deliberation over energy futures. In previous experiments, juries are selected 'randomly' from lists provided by a representative range of community-based associations. Hundreds of small-scale farmers, landless people, and poor urban consumers attended the events. A representative from ActionAid Brazil concluded that 'these people, always excluded from the process of policymaking in issues that affect them very much, had the opportunity to access all the information and to decide about it via members of the jury' (Campolina 2001: 29).

**Citizen-led consultations on national and regional development plans or specific projects:** An example might be the 'Which way Nigeria?' process in which the Nigerian NGO S4C were involved, where the future of the oil economy was a key topic (Rotimi 2012). This involved 35 CSOs selected according to criteria of diversity, regional and sectoral presentation to iteratively build scenarios for the future of the country. Surprisingly to those leading the process, including S4C, energy and climate issues featured highly as people sought to imagine 'life after oil' in Nigeria. An important feature of this example is that climate and energy issues are related to other areas of citizen concern around the economy, security, and wellbeing rather than handled separately. A key challenge in such exercises is then ensuring government buy-in, especially when a parallel government-led envisioning process is under way.

Citizens can also produce their own 'Peoples' Development Plans' which are fed into the public hearings and provide another tool for clarifying the respective expectations and obligations of companies and communities alike. They are developed by local NGOs following large-scale consultations with the communities with which they work about which forms of (industrial) development they would like to see, as well as those they would be opposed to. Often questionnaires and surveys are completed with a range of different stakeholders that have been identified as being directly or indirectly affected by a project. The findings are then compiled and presented at the local popular assembly where they are discussed and changes listed that people want to see. They are then

presented to government and industry actors at the public hearing. The advantage of being presented with a 'Peoples' Development Plan', from an industry point of view, is that responding to a one-off document which expresses a spectrum of demands in a coherent fashion is preferable to trying to deal with a trickle of requests from individuals or specific villages (Newell 2005).

**Planning processes:** Research has shown that self-organised citizen participation can be a major driver of innovation in urban planning. For example, a study on the Chilean city of Santiago found that organised citizens reinforced pro-change trends across diverse scales and that they generated more transparent processes favouring sustainability and democratisation (Sagaris 2014). This case study examines a social movement that emerged in opposition to the country's first major highway concession, in Santiago, Chile (1997) to challenge and change urban planning paradigms. The campaign founded a citizen-led planning institution, Ciudad Viva (Living City), which went on to win a prize in recognition of its contribution. Key conclusions include the fact that citizen participation can often be 'rather ritualistic' but how approaches to participation can reinforce the role of self-organising CSOs in introducing innovation into existing systems. This suggests that 'thinking about citizens as planners in their own right, rather than as mere participants at specific points in a planning process', opens the way to more effective strategies for innovating responses to the climate crisis (*ibid.*: 74).

**Peoples' hearings:** Public hearings in theory provide a mechanism for anticipating and addressing problems associated with proposed energy investments. Though many companies are legally obliged to conduct such hearings, in practice they often fail to do so. Formally, in India for example, companies are required to notify the public one month in advance of a public meeting through an advertisement in one English-speaking newspaper and in one newspaper written in a local language. In practice, it has been reported that a company will run an advertisement in just one edition of each language paper, never run it again, and often select those newspapers that are least widely read. Also, of course, the level of illiteracy excludes many poorer groups unless a conscious effort is made by local Panchayat committees (the most local level of village governance in India) and others to raise awareness about forthcoming meetings. The India-based action research NGO Participatory Research In Asia (PRIA), through its local partners, has been involved in setting up informal public hearings at which various stakeholders are invited to air their concerns, and also to serve as a platform where those responsible for an investment can be publicly held to account. These have been held, for example, in Chiplun, Maharashtra and Vizag, Andhra Pradesh around the activities of energy and petro-chemical companies. It is, of course, possible that the company will refuse to attend an informal hearing, given that it is not legally obliged to do so, claiming that it is directly accountable only to the state government – a risk inherent in CSOs

electing to create autonomous spaces of their own rather than take up roles designated for them by states or governments in invited spaces.

However, companies anxious to defend themselves against negative publicity, or wanting to generate goodwill in the regions in which they are operating may choose to attend (Newell 2005).

A more recent example of this being taken up by activists in Mozambique and Nigeria is a Peoples' Health Tribunal. In the words of the organisers:

The People's Health Tribunal will bring together communities across Africa that have been affected by their extractive activities. By sharing how extraction has caused harm to their health, their communities, and their land, participants will hold fossil fuel corporations to account. Running over two sessions... the tribunal to bear witness to the health impacts of environmental injustice and learn about shared struggles.

(People's Health Tribunal n.d.: para. 3)

This is seen both as an accountability tool and a means to secure restorative justice. As the activists put it:

Movements across the globe are standing in solidarity demanding that they are held accountable, and reparative justice is delivered for communities affected. Shell, Total, other polluting corporations, and the big banks that finance them make their decisions in London, the historic heart of the empire built on the exploitation of people and land in the global South. We will bring the verdict to them.

(*ibid.*: para. 4)

In Nigeria, a 'Peoples' AGM' (annual general meeting) was held in Abuja, resulting in a ten-point resolution and a call to,

President Muhammadu Buhari and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC Ltd, to as a matter of urgency, withdraw the operating License of Shell over its complicity in the environmental and ecological injustices ranging from divestment from on-shore to off-shore leaving behind the problems it created in the Niger Delta, weakened climate change commitment for short-term profit, and its poor human rights record in Nigeria.

(ANEEJ 2023: para. 1)

**Permanent Peoples' Tribunals** have been used to critically evaluate the performance of European multinational corporations (MNCs), including in the energy sector in Latin America as well as on water issues (Icaza *et al.* 2010). The Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, launched in Vienna in May 2006 on 'Neo-

liberal policies and European TNCs in Latin America and the Caribbean', provided one such opportunity allowing environmental activists from Uruguay to bring cases against the water companies Suez of France and Aguas de Barcelona y Bilbao from Spain. Additionally, Mapuche activists from Patagonia, Argentina presented evidence of alleged illegal sales of their land to foreign investors, such as the Italian fashion retailer Benetton. Such popular fora can help produce informal patterns of regulation by raising awareness and generating expectations about companies' conduct, even if they are unable to force companies to pay compensation for what they have done.

Tribunals such as the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal on Environmental Hazards and Human Rights (1992) and the International Water Tribunal Foundation (1994) support communities lacking in legal and financial resources, which are normally excluded from legal processes, and help to bring to light cases that otherwise may not be heard (IWT 1994). Such processes seek to extend national and international legislation, as well as stimulate the proper implementation of existing legislation. But such procedures are unlikely to be able to call to account some of the worst violators of social and environmental standards who are less subject to popular pressure and less willing to participate in fora that have no official legal standing. These mechanisms will also be less useful in resolving open conflict between a company and a community affected negatively by its investment, where there is not much scope for conciliation and the power imbalance is such that the authority of law and the backing of sanctions may be necessary to ensure that conflicts are resolved peacefully as we discuss in section 3.8 on litigation.

### 3.3 Strengthening accountability

Other approaches seek to open-up, deepen, and expand closed or invited spaces by challenging their legitimacy with regard to expressions and articulations of broader social demands claimed from below. The examples below highlight this.

**Popular plebiscites:** A peoples' consultation on the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) began in September 2002 and involved a variety of public-education campaigns on the FTAA, along with opportunities for citizens to register their opinions on the proposed accord. The first such campaign was carried out in Brazil, where more than 10 million people voted against the FTAA (Gershman and Hansen-Kuhn 2005). The plebiscite took place 1–7 September 2002, in 3,894 municipalities. Ninety-eight per cent of the 10,149,542 voters were contrary to the accession.

**Citizen guides:** Many organisations and networks provide citizen guides on the just transition building on long-standing traditions of promoting economic literacy to make knowledge and practice more accessible to communities and inspire



action. For example, Just Associates (JASS) is a community of practice of activists, educators, and scholars from around the world who undertake sustained work to strengthen the capacities of movements and activists long-term for systemic change (they call this sustained work feminist movement building). As part of this and drawing on their historical roots and nearly 20 years of work, JASS produces research designed to support activists, inspire allies, educate policymakers, and inform donors. Their training and tools include guides on 'Building Just Futures: A Worldmaking Game', which utilises interactive play to help understand how to transform power and oppressive systems, and a new toolkit, 'Behind the Scenes of Extractives: Money, Power & Community Resistance', for women land defenders confronting unwanted and damaging extractive projects (JASS n.d.-b). JASS has also produced a series of resources around defending rights in hostile contexts, in response to the crackdown on activists and civic spaces (JASS n.d.-a). Many of their resources are produced in multiple languages to make them more accessible to citizens.

**Participatory budgeting:** Participatory budgeting can be an impactful way of engaging citizens on energy issues and climate action (Capaccioli *et al.* 2017). In 2019, the Portuguese city of Lisbon introduced a 'green participatory budget' that sought to galvanise support for mitigation and adaptation projects. Once empowered and resourced, citizens allocated public funds towards cycle lanes, tree planting schemes to reduce urban heating, and water capture and storage initiatives. This participatory scheme has also ensured consistent annual investments into Lisbon's low-carbon transition, while raising the awareness of citizens of the benefits mitigation and adaptation policy can bring to their everyday lives – from cleaner air to more child-friendly streets. While participatory budgeting has the potential to be introduced in cities around the world, there are important contextual factors that must be navigated. For instance, the potential achievements of participatory budgeting depend on the platform and voice given to citizens as well as the legislative strength of city councils in the policymaking process (Falanga, Verheij and Bina 2021). In this regard, participatory budgeting projects often go hand-in-hand with efforts to secure greater devolution from central governments.

**To address intergenerational justice:** Other measures to foster and strengthen accountability include the installation of ombudspersons for future generations, which have been introduced, for example, in Hungary, Australia, Israel, and Wales (Newell *et al.* 2021a; Smith 2009). The role of these ombudspersons is to increase the influence of younger generations over government decision-making and, in turn, improve accountability (Newell *et al.* 2021a). Unlike the traditional role of an ombudsperson, who often focuses on maladministration, individual complaints and the failure of government procedures, an ombudsperson for future generations represents a collection of interests of people not directly represented through democratic process and policy decision-making (Andersen



2018). While there are clear benefits for accountability in creating such posts, there is a very real risk that the stability and effectiveness of such independent institutions will be vulnerable to changes in government, electoral cycles, and constitutional changes. More broadly, a particular challenge is how to include groups without a clear voice such as children or future generations most affected by today's actions and inactions on climate change. For example, a key issue for generating action in the face of climate disasters and improving planning for disaster avoidance is how to engage with the most vulnerable groups in a way which strengthens agency and is not disempowering. As Tanner *et al.* argue, for example,

Children under 18 are often considered the vulnerable, passive victims of disaster events and in need of protection by parents and adults in the community, who in turn make decisions and take actions on their behalf. Yet children have unique perceptions of the world in which they live, and they have the capacity to act as agents of change.

(Tanner *et al.* 2009: 54)

The authors suggest, 'widening community participation to include children is crucial for successfully tackling development issues in a changing climate' (*ibid.*: 54)

### 3.4 Contesting expertise, building knowledge

Just transition processes are informed by 'expert' opinions about goals, targets, social and technological pathways and their respective costs and benefits. Whose expertise and knowledge shape these discussions has a big impact on which issues and whose concerns are recognised and acted upon. Hence knowledge politics is a critical site of mobilisation for just transitions. Here we summarise some tools and strategies aimed at opening-up transition discussions to a plurality of voices.

**Challenging dominant narratives to increase citizen voice:** Pandey and Sharma (2021) present three cases of renewable energy transition projects from India to engage with the interplay of knowledge politics, vulnerability, and recognition-based energy justice. They argue that non-participation is a mode of resistance against subversive knowledge politics. Despite projected benefits and 'apparent needs', people do not accept the pre-defined roles and identities prescribed for them in renewable energy transition projects. Shaw and Corner (2017) from the organisation Climate Outreach meanwhile used a Narrative Workshop methodology to test and develop narratives around energy transitions and climate policy with a diverse range of UK citizens. The first case study uses examples from several workshops held with centre-right public audiences to

demonstrate how the methodology has been applied to identify climate change narratives and vocabulary which reflect conservative values. The second case study illustrates how the methodology was used to create a template for a national climate change conversation in Scotland.

### **Energy justice through Participatory Multi-Criteria Analysis (PMCA):**

PMCA's are increasingly used to involve stakeholders in the decision-making process and evaluation of low-carbon solutions. They can vary in terms of methodologies and evaluations, but usually have the following steps in common: 'definition of potential solutions, involvement of stakeholders (by gathering their objectives, and/or inviting them for the evaluation of the solution), and the evaluation of the solutions (based on qualitative and/or quantitative data)' (Lode *et al.* 2022: 4). Proponents of PMCA's often claim to reach decisions with a fairer decision-making process, output, and acceptance; whereas, detractors highlight concerns around,

the topic of participation (involvement of stakeholders versus experts), evaluation of criteria (transparent evaluation versus black-boxed evaluation), capacity building (presentation of results versus local learning processes), applicability in different locations (global North versus global South), as well as decision-making (participation versus decision-making power).

(*ibid.*: 4–5)

Lode *et al.* (2022) research the influence of PMCA on energy justice through practical applications in three emerging energy communities in Brinkmann, Argentina, San Pedro de Atacama, Chile, and Medellin, Colombia based on criteria assessing procedural, recognition, distributional, restorative, and cosmopolitan (how energy solutions have varying impact across different geographies) energy justice. The PMCA's were used to study the technical possibility and social acceptance by the affected stakeholders. Overall, they find that procedural and recognition justice aspects can be enhanced with PMCA, but it has limited effects on distributional, restorative, and cosmopolitan energy justice. They conclude that the question should be not if PMCA's can lead to more energy just solutions but how can PMCA's 'be applied to reach more energy just solutions' (*ibid.*: 26). In particular, the paper notes that 'fair representation remained a difficult aspect and requires targeted strategies before applying PMCA's' (*ibid.*: 26). PMCA's should also be embedded in a larger transition process which requires more supporting strategies that,

target to reach and represent the needs and opinions of vulnerable groups, establish dedicated channels to obtain information and to share opinions, to conduct thorough scenario building in collaboration with the affected stakeholders which include considerations on

ownership, voting, and other rights and to establish clear mechanisms to distribute potential benefits of the solution. (Lode *et al.* 2022: 26)

**Citizen science:** This can include citizen monitoring of the social and environmental impacts of projects including groups such as Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and Earth Rights Action in Nigeria and Justiça Ambiental in Mozambique. Other strategies seek more explicitly both to challenge and to plug gaps in state infrastructures of enforcement. In the case of the National Thermal Power Corporation in Vizag India, PRIA provided basic pollution-testing equipment (litmus tests for acidity in the water) so that communities can themselves monitor pollution levels and keep their own records alongside the 'official' ones kept by state pollution control boards (Newell 2005).

**Scenario-building:** Moving from what is (the current situation), to 'what if?' (imagining alternative futures) (Hopkins 2019) demonstrates the possibility of change through action. Sometimes citizens can construct their own – or co-produce scenarios for alternative energy futures. This can also help understand what is socially acceptable/desirable in a transition at the local level (Cherry *et al.* 2022). Larsen and Gunnarsson-Östling (2009) explore processes of citizen participation in constructing scenarios and applying the concepts of resilience, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity. They explore the role of deliberative planning processes as a means to achieve legitimate, effective, and sustainable futures. They conclude that methods for citizen participation applied in exploring different science and technology options also provide useful insight for this type of planning processes (*ibid.*: 260). Cherry *et al.* (2022) also explored emotional and place-based scenarios for energy systems change with residents in Port Talbot, South Wales, through the development of local characters or 'personas'. This allowed them to situate deliberation of complex sociotechnical energy issues within a local context and grounding it in the emotional relationships that matter in residents' everyday lives and also existing vulnerabilities. They conclude that persona-based exploration is a valuable tool for looking at potentially controversial areas in energy-systems transitions, 'better orienting us to the aspects of vulnerability and justice which most matter to affected communities' (*ibid.*: 2).

### 3.5 Protest politics

Alongside these engagements with claimed and invited spaces, other movements have adopted more '**outsider**' strategies of contestation around climate change in general such as the Fridays for the Future movement which mobilised 1.4 million children and young people worldwide to come out on strike (Rapid Transition Alliance 2019) and Extinction Rebellion which has used waves of civil disobedience to advance its demands to: (i) declare a climate emergency

(which many governments and local councils then did); (ii) achieve carbon neutrality by 2025; and (iii) create a citizens' assembly on climate change. Other movements in this vein of activism have included **Just Stop Oil** and **Insulate Britain**, which focused much more on questions of energy and transitions aimed at raising awareness and holding governments to account for their inaction on climate change. These more oppositional strategies build on a long legacy of protest by environmental defenders such as indigenous peoples' groups who often inhabit the frontlines of extraction. Having documented 26 indigenous frontline struggles against fossil fuel projects across all stages of the fossil fuel infrastructure development chain, the Indigenous Environment Network report on *Indigenous Resistance against Carbon* underscores the material significance of such activism noting, 'Indigenous resistance has stopped or delayed greenhouse gas pollution equivalent to at least one-quarter of annual US and Canadian emissions' (IEN and OCI 2021).

Wider spaces of **protest politics** can include local meetings, demonstrations, and occupations often with significant impact on energy transition pathways. In Europe in 2019, both the MidCat pipeline between Spain and France and the Gothenburg terminal in Sweden were cancelled. Though interest in reviving the MidCat pipeline has risen in the wake of the war in Ukraine, one report noted,

oppositions to the construction of MidCat/STEP have sprung on both sides of the Pyrenees since 2011. Dozens of groups of concerned citizens, NGOs and members of the European Parliament are fighting against the project, contributing to public consultations, launching legal actions and putting pressure on decision makers at local, regional, national and European levels.  
(Simon and Marchand 2018: 14)

Meanwhile, indigenous leaders and allies held a March–May 2019 training tour for 1,160 people in nine US cities answering the call to stop the Keystone XL pipeline and protect water and ancestral lands, a project whose licence was revoked in April 2020 (Lakhani 2020). As well as restricting opportunities for profit, through contestation, media coverage and public debate, such protests also raise questions about the desirability and sustainability of these projects.

Protests also target corporate actors as a form of '**civil regulation**': civil society-based (informal) regulation of private business aiming to fill governance gaps left by the absence or non-enforcement of state regulation (Newell 2001). In relation to its critical form, it takes a range of forms from shareholder activism to media campaigns and organised boycotts (Newell 2008) and the building of broader advocacy campaigns such as the recent 'Don't Gas Africa' campaign in which Power Shift were involved alongside groups in Mozambique (Don't Gas Africa n.d.). There has been an upturn in shareholder activism in recent years. Even ExxonMobil, long one of the most stalwart opponents of climate action, was

defeated in a May 2021 shareholder vote in which Engine No. 1, an activist investment firm demanding that Exxon accelerate a transition to clean energy, succeeded in electing three nominees to the company's board of directors. Even more proactively, there are a number of joint investor initiatives aimed at the world's largest GHG emitters. The Climate Action 100 initiative, for example, enlists fund management firms to work with the 100 most important emitters, which together account for two-thirds of annual global industrial emissions, to implement decarbonisation plans (Newell 2021b).

### 3.6 Using the law

**Legal challenges** over human rights, land, procedural injustices and environmental impacts provide another opening for citizens to raise concerns about proposed energy developments. A case in point would be the recently successful case brought against the oil giant Shell in the Netherlands, where the Dutch court ruled that Shell must cut its emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 (BBC 2021). Legal actions also open up other avenues of resistance and accountability. The landmark youth climate lawsuit against the US government (*Juliana v the United States*) is a constitutional climate change case against the US federal government, filed by 21 young individuals in 2015. At the time, the youngest was eight and the oldest 19. This case looks at the actions of the federal government for the past several decades of helping to perpetuate the climate crisis by continuing to fund the fossil fuel economy, endangering the lives of all citizens, but disproportionately those of younger citizens and future generations. In the end, the court found that the Juliana plaintiffs lacked standing to press constitutional climate claims against the federal government, but the case attracted welcome publicity to the government's role in perpetuating the climate crisis.

In a very different setting host communities and settlements of the Niger Delta, Nigeria's principal oil-producing region, have suffered the impact of oil spills for decades. The Bille and Ogale communities have been engaged in litigation with Shell in the UK Courts since 2015, with over 13,000 residents having now filed claims for loss of livelihoods and damages. The full trial is likely to occur in 2024 (Leigh Day 2023). Theoretically, when a spill takes place in the Niger Delta, clean-up and remediation is meant to take place to remove the oil, restore the natural environment to its pre-spill state, and compensate anyone affected for damages caused. This is provided for in different ways in Nigerian legislation, and there are a number of impact assessment and claims procedures – i.e. the oil spill compensation system (Frynas 1999). However, the system is not fit for purpose – it is convoluted, overlapping, slow, has conflicting concepts, and rarely resolves compensation claims satisfactorily. Furthermore, local communities rarely have the expertise to negotiate effectively with oil companies on compensation claims, meaning that damages have to be pursued through the

courts. Accessing this system requires financial resources many communities do not have (SDN 2020).

Concerning the human rights dimensions of energy transitions, the case of conflicts over coal in Colombia offers a case in point. Colombia's Cesar mining region is a major supplier of coal to many of Europe's coal-fired power plants. In December 2020, the Colombian Office of the Prosecutor General charged the current president and the former president of the Colombian subsidiary of US-based coal mining company Drummond Inc. with complicity in crimes against humanity, asserting that the executives provided logistical and other support to the paramilitary group Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, AUC) between 1996 and 2001 (Wilde-Ramsing *et al.* 2021: 6).

The crimes were reportedly committed as part of a strategy to incite terror in the local population with the aim of displacing them and stealing their land, a strategy that eventually resulted in the forced displacement of more than 55,000 individuals.

(*ibid.*: 6)

The human rights violations in Cesar are well-known and documented; it is estimated that throughout the coal mining corridor between 1996 and 2006, AUC paramilitary groups forced the displacement of 59,000, mainly farming families; killed at least 3,100 people, including trade union and community leaders; and disappeared 240 others (*ibid.*: 11).

Another major announcement in February 2021, was the imminent departure of Prodeco from the Cesar region (although its parent company, Glencore, has expanded its operations in the neighbouring region of La Guajira (PAX 2022)). Prodeco/Glencore had also been implicated in the forced displacements. In February 2022, Prodeco/Glencore finally released the results of its 2019 due diligence investigation into the human rights impacts of its operations in Cesar, commissioned to comply with international standards for Responsible Business Conduct (UN Guiding Principles, UNGP and OECD guidelines). However, PAX (2022) argues that 'the report is less than comprehensive and sometimes contradictory'. Asamblea Campesina del Cesar (The Peasants' Assembly of Cesar), the largest organisation of victims of human rights violations in the region, has been calling on the company for years to engage in a dialogue on this and other matters relating to Prodeco, but such a process still has not started (*ibid.*; Wilde-Ramsing *et al.* 2021). There is an open invitation to Drummond and Prodeco from the leaders of the forcibly displaced communities to enter into a formal dialogue about truth and reconciliation, with the idea to create a compensation fund. However, there is a fear that the phasing out of coal in Europe will lead to the departure of more companies from Cesar, without these companies first taking responsibility for the impacts they have caused or to which they have contributed (PAX 2022). In December 2022, the Colombian



constitutional court accepted a case on behalf of the Yukpa indigenous people (in the Cesar region), demanding ‘post-consultation’ and reparation for what lawyers argue is physical and cultural genocide due to extractivist practices. The Yukpa are clear that reparation must extend beyond monetary measures; it must involve a just transition from fossil fuel extraction following the closure of the mines, and must take account of the demands of their territorial authorities, as well as those of peasants and Afro-Colombian communities. However, in cases such as that of the Yukpa, dominant legal narratives are unable to recognise the harm to life, land and territory caused by the ordinary operations of extractivist capitalism (Coleman and Martínez 2023).

Other cases have been brought by alliances across Africa against the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). Here the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) reserved judgment after hearing arguments for and against the objection to the court’s jurisdiction filed by the Secretary-General of the East African Community, the Republic of Tanzania and Republic of Uganda in response to the case challenging the construction of the EACOP until the questions of environmental, social justice, and climate justice concerns raised in the case are heard and determined. Lucien Limacher, Head of Litigation at Natural Justice said of the case:

The East African Court of Justice is a regional court which has jurisdiction to hear human rights issues when a partner state or institution violates the East African Community Treaty. We believe that in this case, the Respondents have not complied with the Treaty on various grounds, specifically provisions linked to human rights and the environment. We are positive that the East African Court of Justice will give an opportunity for the main hearing to be held and that the issues detailed in the main submission be heard and debated.

(Limacher 2023)

**Environmental justice clinics:** These have been developed as a form of allyship from lawyers wanting to support activists to provide pro bono support for claims, put people in touch with people that can help them and raise awareness about legal rights, how to mount challenges to planning and policy processes and to launch freedom of information requests, for example. The involvement of law school programmes and ‘clinics’ in environmental justice issues and movements is long-standing in the US (Babcock 1995). They provide high-quality legal services to underrepresented communities, whilst at the same time offering students the opportunity to hone their legal skills and tackle important social and policy issues (*ibid.*: 6–7). For example, Georgetown’s Environmental Justice Clinic was established in 1991 (now known as Georgetown’s Environmental Law and Justice Clinic), one of its earliest clinical cases related to

the clean-up of an abandoned coal gasification plant site on the banks of the Anacostia River, Maryland (Babcock 1995). Other cases have included the representation of Coal River Mountain Watch in litigation challenging the approval of a West Virginia policy that unlawfully extends permits for several hundred proposed coal mining operations beyond their termination date (The Environmental Law and Justice Clinic n.d.).

A number of law-related advocacy NGOs and networks have formed in recent years, aimed at advancing the just transition and leveraging the law to challenge fossil fuel projects around the World. For example, Natural Justice, an organisation of lawyers and legal experts specialising in human rights and environmental law founded in 2007 in South Africa, has a Just Energy Transition Africa (JETA) initiative. JETA (formed of non-profit energy and climate justice lawyers) aims to support African communities and CSOs advocating for clean energy and to assist the growth of a legal community of practice across Africa (Natural Justice n.d.). The opening of the Just Transition Lawyering Institute in the US in 2021 is another example. It was formed by a team of lawyers, community organisers, academics, and advocacy allies in partnership with a number of US law schools and journals and is aimed at providing ‘an online training and network-building program for [US-practicing] lawyers looking to align their law practice with the values and demands of just transition’ (Just Transition Lawyering Institute n.d.).

### 3.7 Transnational spaces for civic engagement

To address some of these gaps in participation and representation at national level, groups often seek to forge transnational connections. In relation to trade policy (and the energy issues associated with it) groups such as ‘Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras’ aimed to internationalise awareness of citizen trade campaigns in their opposition to the NAFTA (North America Free Trade Area). For example, the Mobilization on Development, Trade, Labor and the Environment (MODTLE) was established as a tri-national dialogue among activists from all three NAFTA countries (Cavanagh, Anderson and Hansen-Kuhn 2001). Such campaigns were able to upscale to groups with greater resources and different approaches to lobbying such as ‘Development Gap’ that helped in their own advocacy, for example by helping community groups to testify at the US trade commission on NAFTA (Icaza *et al.* 2010).

There has been an enormous amount of transnational activism from border organising around NAFTA to trans-American protests orchestrated through the Hemispheric Social Alliance of labour, environmental, indigenous, women’s, and human rights groups focused on the Summits of the Americas aimed at contesting the FTAA (Saguier 2004). Here the concern was that by reforming the legal base of energy policy in the region, exploration for and extraction of fossil

fuels would increase, further implying both social and environmental impacts on the poorer indigenous communities that inhabit these areas. In terms of just energy transitions, there are lessons about working with rural social movements that are often separated from the centres of power. Challenging elite control of trade policy, centred in national capitals and engaging only the most networked of civil society groups supportive of trade liberalisation, the involvement of rural social movements in trade activism has helped to strengthen environmental justice components of critiques of regional trade policy (Newell 2007).

Still more focused on energy, precedents for cross-border activism include transnational campaigning (around nuclear waste trade, plastics, transnational corporate liability campaigns) to hold polluters to account (such as Shell in Nigeria, Texaco in Ecuador, BP in Colombia), and check the outsourcing of dirty production elsewhere (Kimerling 1996; Newell 2001; Leigh Day 2023). Global governance institutions have long been targeted by social movements from labour, human rights, environmental, and women's groups (O'Brien *et al.* 2000; Keck and Sikkink 1998). The challenge has been to make use of and expand limited invited spaces, often only afforded to more conservative groups (such as the 'big 10' largely Washington-based groups in the US) while using testimonies and bearing witness to the effects of lending decisions on the ground (Park 2011). Funds for climate and energy finance have been a particular target for environmental groups such as the Bretton Woods Project and the Bank Information Center alongside campaigns for fossil fuel subsidy reform at the IMF and challenging regional development banks (AfDB/IDB) over their support for specific energy projects and infrastructures (such as Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America or IIRSA).

Hence, rather than a single corporate target, sometimes transnational mobilisations are aimed against specific infrastructures (including EU transport infrastructures, gas and oil pipelines (XL, Russian gas, IIRSA in South America). For example, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has identified a mixture of transport, hydroelectric power projects and gas pipelines as essential foundations of an infrastructure for integration. Coalitions of NGOs successfully encouraged the IDB to withdraw funding for the controversial Hidrovia proposal to construct a water superhighway to be built on the River Plate in South America. The provision of alternative environmental and economic assessments and a legal case brought by coalitions of opponents in Brazil and Argentina (and backed by the Brazilian government) were key to the successful stalling of this Mercosur initiative (Hochstetler 2003). Activists from Latin America and Europe joined forces to challenge a swathe of new infrastructural projects planned across the region funded by the European Investment Bank (EIB), the IDB and private investors under the banner *Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Sudamericana*.

Alongside more formal public regional and global institutions, energy issues are also increasingly addressed through transnational climate change governance initiatives (Bulkeley *et al.* 2014) including energy focused ones such as REEEP (Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership), REN21 (Renewable Energy Network), the Global Methane Initiative, the Green Power Market Development Group and the Johannesburg Renewable Energy Coalition (Bulkeley *et al.* 2014; Newell 2011; Szulecki *et al.* 2011). REEEP, for example, is an international public–private partnership funded by governments, businesses and development banks, aimed at identifying barriers to and opportunities for the uptake of renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities (Parthan *et al.* 2010). REN21, meanwhile, describes itself as ‘a global policy network that provides a forum for international leadership on renewable energy’. Its goal is to bolster policy development for the rapid expansion of renewable energies in developing and industrialised economies, but it does not fund projects in the way that REEEP does. Open to a wide variety of dedicated stakeholders, REN21 connects governments, international institutions, NGOs, industry associations and other partnerships and initiatives. But it would be fair to say such initiatives are for the most part far removed from the lived realities of transition on the ground in Africa and Latin America and research on transnational climate governance confirms a Northern bias in terms of the membership, issue focus (often enhancing technology cooperation or capacity building) and funding of these transnational forms of governance (Bulkeley *et al.* 2014).

### 3.8 New openings for just transitions

Despite the obstacles to citizen engagements around just transitions, we do see several examples emerging of promising attempts to strengthen and amplify local and national voices in global energy debates. This strand of activism has taken a number of forms aimed at cutting the supply of finance for fossil fuel investment as well as holding richer governments to account for their own ongoing support for fossil fuels even as they demand poorer countries forgo the extraction of fossil fuels.

First, there are campaigns to withdraw financial support to fossil fuels. This means challenging the lending practices of bodies such as the World Bank, as well as bilaterals and governments through advocacy on fossil fuel finance. The issue is that despite the negotiation of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the World Bank Group has invested over US\$12bn in fossil fuel projects between 2015 and 2020, of which US\$10.5bn went into new fossil fuel projects (Urgewald 2020). There have been a number of successes in this regard, including commitments from the EIB to discontinue financial support to fossil fuels and from the UK government to end the use of export finance for fossil fuels including to countries in sub-Saharan Africa, though much work remains to be done and such commitments often come with caveats and exemptions and

need to be situated in the broader landscape of financial flows. Some campaigns have exposed the inconsistencies in government policy between climate objectives and the ongoing pursuit of fossil-fuel extraction, such as the campaign aimed at the activities of specific government agencies in the case of the Paid to Pollute campaign targeted at the UK's oil and gas authority which has a mandate to expand fossil-fuel extraction (Paid to Pollute n.d.). This included a judicial review launched by the campaign group Uplift exposing the fact that since signing the Paris Agreement in 2016, the UK government has paid £3.2bn of public money to North Sea oil and gas companies. Climate campaigners also filed a complaint with the OECD against the UK Export Finance (UKEF) agency on the grounds that financing of fossil fuel projects worldwide contravenes the Paris climate agreement. The complaint was filed by Global Witness claiming that UKEF breached OECD guidelines by neither reporting nor reducing its emissions. As the *Financial Times* reported 'The OECD cannot compel agencies and enterprises to change their behaviour but can publicly state that its rules have been broken, causing embarrassment and reputational damage' (Hodgson 2020).

Second, several groups have also worked to demand accountability of the energy sector through greater transparency of information. Though general models projecting future energy sources and reserves are produced by companies such as BP, the specifics of particular proposed investments are normally only shared with governments and often only at the point where negotiations and pre-approvals have been secured, further diminishing scope for meaningful forms of citizen engagement. This is where groups like EITI, with PWYP's outreach and support, and the World Bank through its Just Transition Initiative and the work of the New Producers Group need to continue trying to build and share best practice around access to information and information sharing and with a wider audience than the usual capital-city-based, technically sophisticated NGOs and thinktanks. It may require the articulation of clear rights and entitlements for citizens to access information through open registries, freedom of information provisions, etc., rather than the more discretionary release of information by those that control it.

Third, in recent years, litigation has emerged against individual fossil fuel projects (e.g. coal mines in Australia and the UK, and oil and gas pipelines in the US), against individual fossil fuel companies (Shell in the Netherlands, Total in France, ExxonMobil in the US), and against carbon majors as a whole (in the Philippines). The recent case against Shell is perhaps one of the most telling examples: the Dutch court ordered Shell to achieve a specific emission reduction target along its entire supply chain, effectively suggesting that the company had to cut back production (Mayer and van Asselt 2023). But litigation has long been used as a strategy for addressing justice issues in the Niger Delta (Frynas 1999)

and in Kenya (in the Lamu case and against several windfarm and geothermal projects) (Newell and Adow 2022).

Finally, and critically, there is widespread resistance to new fossil fuel projects (Temper *et al.* 2020; Carter and McKenzie 2020). This is a rising, but not new, phenomenon of resistance to the expansion of fossil fuel frontiers in the global North and South going back decades, even if climate was not the primary driver (Princen, Manno and Martin 2015). Temper *et al.* (2020) find that over a quarter of fossil fuel projects encountering social resistance have been cancelled, suspended, or delayed. The example of the proposed coal plant on the UNESCO World Heritage site of Lamu off the Kenyan coast is an example of a victory for climate justice. A group of dedicated local campaigners, Save Lamu and DeCOALonise, managed to fend off the financial interests of investors General Motors and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.

It is also important to note that some of this resistance is being articulated around novel articulations of intersectional, multigenerational, multicultural indigenous-led movements seeking to contest climate injustices, the criminalisation of land protection, and expressing forms of anti-colonial solidarity (Spiegel 2021a, 2021b). What this activism highlights and seeks to contest are the ways in which indigenous people are particularly affected by the injustices of fossil fuels (Jonasson *et al.* 2019; Gilio-Whitaker 2019). In these instances, fossil fuels happen to be the campaign focus, but the activism is aimed at contesting, dismantling, and decolonising the very power structures, hierarchies, and failures of recognition which permit and enable these injustices to take place in the first place, routinely distributing the greatest costs of fossil fuel expansion to poorer classes and to people of colour (Bullard 2000; Newell 2005).



## 4. Conclusions

The desire to generate models of just energy partnerships as governments, donors and MDBs are currently doing, or to try and formulate best practice models and guides to just transitions, is entirely understandable in order to help make sense of and place some order on an uncertain and fast-moving terrain. But when it comes to understanding and supporting attempts to open-up just transitions to wider scrutiny by citizens and affected communities, there is a need to ground action plans and interventions in the lived reality of citizens in key sites in the global battle over energy transitions. This includes locations such as Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria: countries that bear witness to the benefits and risks associated with high levels of dependency on fossil fuels, but often lack the means to plan and implement a just transition away from them. There are important lessons to learn across these sites.

The challenges for inclusive deliberation are different in each country. In some cases, exemplified by Nigeria, it is about addressing historical injustices, in terms of failure to access the wealth generated by previous energy exploitation and to secure redress for the social and environmental impacts of earlier extraction. In other contexts, such as Mozambique, it is anticipation of new energy wealth that is fuelling just transition debates, with the key question being who will get what and on whose terms. For Nigeria, where oil has been extracted for some 70 years, any sense of the possibilities of a transition to a low-carbon future faces critical questions of overcoming economic dependence on fossil fuels, as well as the sense of historically rooted and yet unaddressed injustice found in many communities. The need to address these problems (especially around rent theft and unequal land distribution and use) must be integral to any solution in Nigeria, otherwise campaigns for a just energy transition will merely reproduce existing problems (including long-term inequality, social stratification, and social costs) (Obeng-Odoom 2021: 777). Hence principles of restorative justice are often invoked in talking about the importance of the state and corporations accepting responsibility for flaring, land contamination, and previous failures to share the wealth generated from oil exploitation (Bedi 2018). In Nigeria, communities' search for justice has led to both legal conflicts and violence, often as a last resort in the face of failings in procedural and distributive justice.

In Mozambique, which also faces extremely low levels of access to energy while being a major exporter of hydroelectric power, the unrealised promises of the gas fields in the North have become deeply intertwined with hopes for the country's future development. The frustration of these hopes has intersected with currents of ethnic and religious discontent to fuel violent conflict in the region where these resources have been found. A real concern raised in our earlier research was that the scramble for control of energy sources among national

elites and international interests was exacerbating and magnifying existing conflicts in Mozambique, and that this could make the prospect of a just transition even more unlikely (Newell *et al.* 2022b).

In Colombia, questions of restorative justice relating to extractive industries and energy transition are inextricable from the transitional justice mechanisms of the 2016 Peace Accord and associated public discourse and attitudes. Current efforts to build 'total peace' with the remaining guerrilla groups and illegal armed actors cannot but engage with the intricacies of historic regional grievances, many of which arise from the decades-old extractivist development model. As such, achieving just energy transition in Colombia is profoundly intertwined with achieving the peace and justice enshrined in the 2016 Peace Accord. This is the rationale underpinning call for the Energy for Peace (E4P) energy transition project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support 'the planning, building, operation, and transfer of sustainable solar energy projects in conflict-affected communities in support of the peace accords' (USAID 2023: 1). The project aims to align US and Colombian government energy transition efforts aiming to provide clean energy for growth and development in select communities.

A common phenomenon in all three countries – albeit to different degrees – is the contrast between national- and local-level civic space. Although CSOs might be vibrant and strong in the national capital (and in state capitals, in the case of federal Nigeria), they become less dense, vibrant, and well-resourced the further one goes from the centres of economic and political power. Often there is a relatively thin fabric of civil society and a lack of free, dynamic, and empowered civic space at the most local levels.

As Newell *et al.* suggest:

we see a somewhat contradictory picture when it comes to assessing the potential of dialogue and civic engagement on issues of just transition in Africa. On the one hand, the continent, like many places in the world, is facing trends of increasing authoritarianism and closing civic space, particularly in resource rich areas, with deeply entrenched and powerful interests resisting attempts to democratise decision-making. There is concern that the move towards energy transition could worsen these trends even more, leading to an intensification of the reprisals faced by those who speak out against continued extraction of fossil fuel resources, while new corporate actors who have little concern for civic dialogue and human rights take the place of existing operators.

On the other hand, energy policy and the urgency of moves towards a just transition are mobilising a growing level of public debate within

African oil and gas-producing countries. African citizens are increasingly mobilised – around energy rights where access remains precarious, around claims for a rightful share of resources and opportunities where oil and gas revenues have yet to flow and around demands for environmental restoration where fossil fuel extraction has already damaged lands and livelihoods. African civil society is increasingly engaged and informed, despite the exclusionary and technical nature of most existing energy policy debates, and CSOs and activists are developing stronger mutual support networks and more effective strategies for circumventing the repressive measures that have accompanied closing civic space across the continent.

(Newell *et al.* 2022b: 26)

Sovacool *et al.* (2022) explore the configurations of types of infrastructure, actors, tactics, and outcomes of recent opposition to energy transitions across seven carbon-intensive regions in Asia (India), Europe, and North America using literature and 130 case studies. They provide network analyses of the actors and coalitions involved; and develop a typology and frequency analysis of tactics (such as litigation or protest), and outcomes (such as remuneration, policy change, concessions, or labour protections). They show how the configurations of infrastructure, actors, tactics, and outcomes can be explained by differences in national institutions and their responses to global or supranational pressures.

Key challenges derive from decisions about **when** and **how** and **for what** purpose to use specific (invited and claimed) spaces. For example, at times of elections bold promises are often made about energy access, new transport infrastructures and jobs for the regions. They afford an opening for citizens to extract concessions and promises in exchange for votes. But different politics apply to each stage of decision-making: whether it is the articulation of policy demands, participation in invited processes and engaging in siting and planning decisions or shaping financial flows for energy projects through to resisting implementation and launching legal challenges, the nature of the spaces available and how they are used and by whom differs. This greatly complicates the task of proposing strategies that work across contexts without doing away with sharing lessons learned that then must be adapted and reworked in accordance with the peculiarities of struggles in specific places. What it also points to is the value of strategies focused on participation and contestation early in the process at the stage of transition planning and the building of visions over which regions, sectors, technologies and industries to support since these become tools and frameworks for committing resources, attracting investors and the basis of targets and mandates for local officials. Once momentum behind such pathways gathers and finance is committed, it is often more fraught and

costly (politically and financially) to contest projects and infrastructures backed by powerful coalitions of actors through advocacy, law, and protest.

As explored below, there is also uneven access to those spaces and differential patterns of representation. Movements and civil society actors have sought to use a range of tools and tactics to increase the access and representation of marginal voices in these spaces as we have seen above from citizen assemblies on climate change (UK, France, Ireland); to citizen science on impacts (India); and environmental justice law clinics (US) (Cole and Foster 2002). For example, there have been many cases where local opposition to resource investors has been overridden by a government determined to attract investors. The Canadian mining company Manhattan Minerals Corporation ran into controversy over its development of a mine in the Tambo Grande district of Peru requiring the relocation of 2,000 families. This was despite a plebiscite, organised by Oxfam and held in the local municipality in June 2002, that showed 98.7 per cent of local voters were against the project. The involvement of an international NGO, particularly of Oxfam's standing, helped to focus international attention on the project and build linkages to international mining campaigns in Canada (Newell 2007).

Though governments often seek to keep tight control over decision-making on energy and local energy injustices and transitions are ultimately place-based, energy politics occur at all levels amid the growing regional and global governance of energy transitions. Creating spaces, strengthening voice, and building alliances to effectively shape those politics brings its own set of challenges and for activists and local communities in Nigeria, Mozambique and Colombia almost inevitably happens in only the most indirect and mediated of ways.

In some senses it is about renewing the social contract. As Chilvers *et al.* argue,

As the world moves into a low-carbon era, urgent policy and technological developments are placing increasing strain on established relations between science, politics and society. Under these conditions the governance of low-carbon transitions needs to be responsible, inclusive of and responsive to societal values, public concerns and human needs. This is about more than public acceptance and behaviour change. It is crucial to renewing the social contract between citizens and governing institutions and accounting for 'the public interest' in ways that address human needs and ensure more equitable energy transitions. This means moving beyond 'Mainstream approaches to eliciting public views, such as surveys and deliberative processes, are of undoubted value, but underplay and can exclude an ever-growing multiplicity of public engagements with energy and climate change, fuelled by the digital revolution, the rise of social media, citizen-led mobilizations, moves

to more distributed energy systems and so on.  
(Chilvers *et al.* 2021: 256)

We also need to recognise the limits of the power of citizen engagement as it is currently constituted. The main reason why we now face a climate crisis, or that transitions to date have often been socially unjust, is not only a lack of citizen engagement. Incumbent power, intensive lobbying from fossil fuel interests, institutional inertia and poorly functioning markets are among a myriad of reasons why we have failed to bend the emissions curve despite three decades of international action on climate mitigation (Stoddard *et al.* 2021). In theory, much more ambitious climate action could be forthcoming without an increase in citizen engagement should state and corporate leaders show the leadership and vision now required of them. But history shows that the key drivers of change often come from below and transitions that are just and equitable are often articulated first within civil society (Leach and Scoones 2015; Stirling 2015). The key is not to make the alleged lack of a popular mandate a valid reason for inaction because most people are not asked about the consequences of not acting; nor should they be expected to shoulder the responsibility for making complex political choices on their own.

Citizen engagement cannot be reduced to tick-box consultations, brief and formulaic processes overseen by intermediaries and actors outside the context of the energy transition in question. It is more than a question of institutional design; a function of 'plug and play' politics (Newell 2021a). It is best thought of as countervailing (Fung and Wright 2003) or even counter-hegemonic power, as well as providing checks and balances and accountability mechanisms to hold key actors in the energy transition to account. But more fundamentally, it is about contesting dominant configurations of power and seeking to share power and control over energy systems in more even and democratic ways, consistent with models of energy democracy (Van Veelen and van der Horst 2018). As Abramsky puts it:

The most significant social, economic, cultural, political and technological transformations in history were associated with shifts in energy generation: from hunting and gathering to agriculture, from human and animal power for transport and production to wind and the steam engine, from coal and oil and nuclear fission as drivers of industry and war. All these transformations have led to increased concentration of power and wealth. And a very real possibility exists that the coming transformation in the world's energy system will result in similar shifts in power relations.  
(Abramsky 2010: 8)

Though yet to be realised,

The process of building a new energy system, based around a greatly expanded use of renewable energies, has the potential to make an important contribution to the construction of new relations of production, exchange and livelihood that are based on solidarity, diversity and autonomy and are substantially more democratic and egalitarian than the current relations.

(*ibid.*: 7)

Towards that end, and in the meantime, there is much greater scope to think creatively about citizen engagement in all aspects of transitions: not as post-hoc approval or information sharing, but active participation in the design, development, and implementation of just transitions at all levels. The different strategies we have described here reflect a sense of where power lies and embody and enact diverse theories of change. But they also create new relations of power by involving excluded actors in debates and decision-making about pathways to climate action, bringing about a democratising effect, even if in a limited way at first, countering the idea that decision-making about energy is the exclusive preserve of planners, economists, lawyers, businesses, and experts in technology. As well as bringing in new voices and creating new spaces of engagement and deliberation, they also democratise in another sense. They bring about improved accountability and widen the range of issues at stake, offering up alternative framings around climate justice and asking difficult questions about who current systems should serve and how, and so draw attention to the possibility of alternative pathways.

They do this, for example, by exposing the ecological impacts of different policies from campaigns on fossil fuel subsidy reform which highlight the maldistribution of public resources towards incumbents (such as that led by Oil Change International (OCI) and the IISD Global Subsidies Initiative on 'zombie energy' (Gerasimchuk *et al.* 2017)); which expose corporate lobbying to prevent more ambitious climate action (such as Greenpeace UK energy desk exposés about BP's lobbying regarding methane emissions (Greenpeace UK 2019)); to campaigns targeted at MBDs (from the World Resources Institute, Policy Studies Institute and OCI); to fossil fuel divestment (350.org amongst others) (Bergmann 2018; Healy and Barry 2017). They can also support and socialise new ideas for alternative frameworks as is the case with a new NGO coalition that is building support for the idea of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (Newell and Simms 2020).

We have described a rich but uneven ecosystem of citizen engagement. In practice and in reality, citizens and activists move in and out of different spaces and moments of engagement and opposition, collaboration and contention. Thinking ecologically about mobilisation means reflecting on the interrelationship



and mutually reinforcing (at times) effect of the diversity of strategies and tactics employed. These range from negotiations, partnerships, social innovation, legal activism, media work, and marches through to strikes, occupations, boycotts, civil disobedience, and direct action. Actors and their agency need to be looked at in relation to one another, rather than in isolation and ‘towards systemic approaches to mapping participation [which] can provide plural and robust forms of social intelligence needed to govern low-carbon transitions in more socially responsive, just and responsible ways’ (Chilvers *et al.* 2021: 250). Writing about energy transitions, Chilvers *et al.* posit:

behaviour change studies focus on energy consumption and demand in everyday life, attitude surveys and deliberative processes tend to focus on public acceptability of new technologies and policies, whereas community energy initiatives engage citizens in becoming local producers of renewable energy. Through adopting narrow, discrete and highly partial perspectives on participation, many existing approaches thus fail to capture the diverse, multiple, and interconnected ways in which publics engage with energy systems on an ongoing basis.

(*ibid.*: 250)

We have noted several enabling conditions for more effective citizen engagement with climate action, while highlighting some of the challenges that must be overcome. At a fundamental level, key enabling conditions include the protection of rights and democratic space, transparency, availability of information and efforts to promote citizen climate literacy and citizenship. Creating, maintaining, and delegating spaces for citizen engagement requires an ongoing effort and the commitment of both resources and political will. Capacity-building for community-level facilitation is also critical and the vital role that facilitators play must be acknowledged and encouraged. Trust though is fundamental. If the social contract is to be renegotiated and preserved – and citizens are to believe that engaging with the state results in recognition of their voices – states, corporations, and other actors need to show they are responsive to citizen engagement and its outcomes.

In sum, key lessons on using citizen engagement to stimulate more inclusive transitions include the following:

- **We need greater nuance and clarity** about: (i) **which** citizens are engaging with just transitions (the demography of engagement including its gender, race, and ethnic dimensions); (ii) **how** they are engaging (through what means and strategies); (iii) **when**: at what stage in the process; (iv) **where and why** (to better understand motivations and the uneven geographies of citizen engagement with diverse transitions in different places); and (v) around **which types of transition** (at which levels, in which arenas, targeted at which

interventions). This helps to move beyond generic descriptions of how citizens can and should engage with just transitions to more meaningful and targeted thinking about which strategies will work for whom, when and where, depending on the prevailing context and conditions for transition.

- **At present only a subset of citizens is currently actively and directly engaged with just transitions.** This will have to change if transformative change is to take hold. While there is a spectrum of citizen engagement, it is currently polarised: on the one hand, well-organised and highly educated groups from richer segments of society concentrated in cities and in wealthier parts of the world, often making use of invited spaces of engagement, and on the other hand, excluded and disenfranchised groups of protesters and vulnerable groups (such as indigenous groups and youth movements) are adopting strategies of resistance through blockades, disruption and the like, who are currently being bypassed by narrow and conventional approaches to top-down invited participation. While there has always been, and will always be an inside-outside dynamic, deeper and more extensive forms of citizen engagement would appear to be a prerequisite for socially embedding more ambitious and far-reaching climate action. This means targeting the vast populations of citizens between these polarised extremes, whose lives will be affected one way or another by energy transitions unfolding around the world.
- **The responsibility to enhance citizen engagement is shared** between those wielding power in governments, cities, corporations, and international institutions, for example, and civil society actors themselves. It is not, however, a responsibility that civil society actors should shoulder themselves and the individualisation of responsibility should be resisted. Sustained, serious and meaningful invited spaces of engagement need to be created at all levels and in all spaces of decision-making. At the moment, there is an imbalance between attempts to claim spaces of engagement and the provision and protection of invited spaces. Without more provision of the latter, designed and convened with justice principles in mind, only more dominant, well-resourced, and well-organised groups and voices will be heard and prevail in shaping future energy policy pathways.
- **There is significant scope for learning and innovation** amongst and between citizens through civil society; between governments about how best to support and enable citizen engagement with transitions; between companies on how to bring in citizen voices to the fore in delivering their net-zero strategies, and a key role for regional and international organisations in supporting financially and politically the creation and protection of spaces for civic engagement by fostering transparency, accountability, and participation in the regions and sectors in which they are active.

- **To effectively support just transitions, citizen engagement should not be narrowly focused on climate and energy policy in isolation.** The drivers of climate change and its impacts mean it is important to increase citizen engagement across policy areas that relate to just transitions, such as industry, trade, finance, agriculture, housing, and transport.
- **There are a number of tools, strategies, and approaches to citizen engagement that are currently under-used,** but which have significant potential to help accelerate just transitions. These include climate assemblies, citizen auditing of projects, plans and policies, participatory adaptation planning, participatory budgeting and standing independent panels and commissions to hold governments and others to account for their climate policy obligations. Which tools can be used and for what purpose will depend on the context in terms of available resources, scope for mobilisation and the degree of civic space available. It is no coincidence that in the settings we have focused on here (Colombia, Mozambique, and Nigeria) efforts to engage publics in discussions of just transitions have largely come from below and in spite of (not because of) the state. This is in stark contrast to government Institute for Just Transition in Spain, for example, where the government has helped oversee 15 just transition agreements through a participatory process of diagnoses of employment and other impacts, tripartite social dialogues and plans for alternatives (Instituto para la Transición Justa n.d.). There is valuable further work to do in exploring which tools and strategies work for whom, when and around which issues; a project that will have to be the product of live reflection and learning given the emergent nature of many just transition processes.
- **To be effective, tools and processes for citizen engagement need to deliberately target and enable traditionally excluded and vulnerable groups,** such as racialised and ethnic minorities, indigenous groups and children, to participate in decision-making at all levels. They need to reflect feminist analysis and principles if they are to ensure due representation of and attention to women, reverse gender-blind policy, planning and implementation and introduce fresh and critical perspectives on growth-centric extractivist development models. This must go far beyond representation to deliver genuine participation, as mitigation and adaptation will impact different communities in groups in myriad ways. For transformative climate action to take hold, it must not exacerbate existing social cleavages along the lines of gender, race, and class to prevent unjust burdens being placed on some groups and not others.

As noted above, however, there is often also a critically important neglected or ‘missing middle’ of actors not yet part of the debate for or against particular transition pathways. This is a set of actors not confined to middle classes but

certainly made up of them with more political clout and resources than poorer and disenfranchised groups on the frontlines of extraction, but not as well connected and influential as elite business groups and social actors close to government, whose electoral weight in democratic settings can often be decisive. Not being wealthy enough to be able to insulate themselves from the effects of disruptions to the energy system nor to protect themselves from the effects of climate change yet each having a vote and potentially a voice, they may hold critical sway over the direction of energy politics. In many activist discourses this 'missing middle' is overlooked in the attempt to hypothecate funds from taxing polluter elites to raise funds to lift people out of energy poverty through home insulation programmes, for example. There is both a challenge and an opportunity to build support for just transitions among more mainstream groups and less politically organised citizens via connections to co-benefits of action around health, job opportunities and new investment and greater security.

Key challenges going forward include how to enable, embed, and improve learning about just transitions across spaces, regions, and actors. The review here suggested such experiences are thus far often mediated and articulated by regional and global bodies (such as donors and development banks) who have a particular stake in the issue and an interest in a particular view of just transition. There is a pressing need to facilitate inter- and intra-movement learning about emerging experience of engaging with just transitions and opening them up to citizen engagement. The use of video testimonies, shared events and activist exchanges, online learning and events, citizen guides and joint statements are being used by groups in this space, but they need to be inclusive and useful for communities on the frontline of just and unjust transitions and hence sensitive to power and resource inequalities within civil society. Such tools and approaches, grounded in vernacular understandings and engagements with just transitions, challenge and go beyond the more top-down, formal, invited and public-only approaches to just transitions which assume the possibility of partnership between equal partners while obscuring the power dynamics which both create unjust transitions and shape the possibilities of building more socially and ecologically just transitions.

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