

A Just Energy Transition for South Africa



What is an energy transition?

It is a shift from our current energy system to one that is better in terms of sustainability, environmental impact, climate change, human health, economics, employment and social equity.

Why do we need an energy transition?

In many countries, including South Africa, current energy systems are based primarily on fossil fuels, such as coal and oil.

The problem is that fossil fuels have a number of undesirable aspects:

1. Extraction and use causes environmental damage such as air and water pollution.
2. Contribute to climate change via high greenhouse gas emissions.
3. Detrimental effect on human health, such as respiratory diseases.
4. Not suitable for social ownership and other measures to address inequality.
5. No longer the cheapest form of energy.

Renewable energy (RE), such as wind and solar, are now able to outperform fossil fuels on all these measures. A future energy system based primarily on RE will be better for people and the planet.

What is a JET?

A Just Energy Transition (JET) aims to make the process of shifting to a better energy system as fair and 'just' as possible.

The justice part focuses on looking after people in the current energy system (such as workers in the coal sector) who could be negatively affected (such as job losses) by this energy transition.

So part of a JET would be the organized shift from coal to RE in a way that empowers and uplifts workers in the coal sector who may face job losses.



Why do we need a JET?

While a progressive shift to RE is to the benefit of the majority of citizens in the long term, there will be a minority of people who will be negatively affected in the short term. A 'just' transition is needed to prevent or reduce these negative aspects.

Across the world, RE prices continue to drop, so a shift toward RE will happen because it is now cheaper. However, if left to the business world, there is unlikely to be adequate attention given to social aspects such as worker re-skilling and re-employment.

Since energy underpins many of the basic human rights, there is an ethical and moral obligation to apply principles of justice to the energy transition.

Why do we need a JET Plan?

In short, a JET will not happen spontaneously. Without a government backed plan for a JET, we will surely see a slow and messy transition where workers in the fossil fuel sector do not receive adequate reskilling and employment opportunities. There is evidence of this from other countries that failed to plan for their energy transitions. Thousands of workers lost their jobs and there was no plan to reskill and rehire them elsewhere. South Africa must learn from this.

We need a JET Plan.



Current energy system dominated by FOSSIL FUELS:

- Carbon intensive
- Affects human health and environment
- Increasing price trend



Future energy system dominated by RENEWABLE ENERGY:

- Low carbon emissions
- Better for health and environment
- Decreasing price trend



INEVITABLE ENERGY TRANSITION

Without Plan:

- Principles of capitalism and free market economy are applied
- Slow, Profits to corporations, workers not looked after

JET Plan:

- Principles of Justice and Equity are applied
- Faster, workers empowered and opportunities for social improvement



Currently there is no plan for a JET in SA.

It is critically important that all stakeholders work together to lobby government to invest heavily in the construction of a JET plan.

The JET plan must detail how SA can quickly move to a better energy system while also providing opportunities to workers in the fossil fuel sector for compensation, re-training and new employment.

For more information on a JET visit: <https://90by2030.org.za/just-energy-transition/>

