

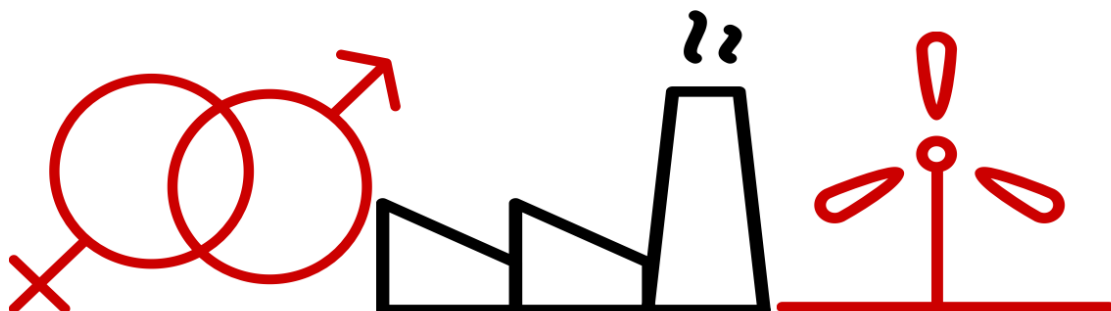
WE DO DISCUSSION PAPER Gender Equality & Just Transition

The following discussion paper was drafted by Majandra Rodriguez Acha in summary of a dialogue hosted by WEDO at the UN climate change negotiations in Bonn, Germany on May 25, 2016.

This event explored how the Paris Agreement can be implemented in a just and equitable manner; based on a feminist analysis of a "just transition". Panelists also provided a review of gender-responsive mandates and decisions under the UNFCCC, and concrete policy recommendations for enhancing gender-just implementation at national and regional levels, particularly with regards to finance provision.

The panel featured:

Bridget Burns, Advocacy and Communications Director, WEDO
Anabella Rosemberg, Policy Officer, International Trade Union Confederation
Liane Schalatek, Associate Director, Heinrich Böll Foundation North America
Majandra Rodriguez Acha, Young Feminist Fellow for Climate Justice, WEDO (Moderator)



A Just Transition away from fossil fuels

The concept of a just transition originates from the labor movement in North America, particularly conflicts around the chemical industry in Canada and the health of its workers, which led the labor movement to come to the realization that labor and environmental concerns cannot be opposed. To this day, much of the private sector is in fact laggard with regards to its compliance of environmental and labor laws and regulations. For example, in the international commerce of flowers, workers are exposed to dangerous pesticides, in addition to inadequate wages. A just transition away from fossil fuels must therefore not only be a transition away from polluting industries and unhealthy work environments, but also from economic insecurity. Ultimately, as our economies transition away from the fossil fuel industry in the face of the climate crisis, job losses in the short term must be countered by a transition towards healthier and more just labor conditions.

The context in which climate action needs to happen is one of growing inequality, demonstrated by the fact that there are 60 people with more capital than the poorest 3 billion people on this planet, and by increasing environmental degradation. Industries are moving towards a greater individualization of working relationships, and there is a reduced capacity for collective action in the workplace. All of these elements contribute to an increased sense of insecurity, particularly with regards to expectations for our futures. Climate action, seen in this context, is an opportunity to push back against these trends. We must ask ourselves, what kind of work do we want in the future? What kind of production and services? Many are calling for the socialization and re-localization of work, for basic social protections, for work that benefits people and communities and has a duty to protect the planet. The debate on just transitions allows us to rethink the kind of economic system we want, and the challenges that we must overcome to make it a reality.

A Just Transition from a feminist perspective

When we talk about “just transition” from a women’s rights and feminist perspective, we must begin by looking at current socially constructed roles and sectors. For example, within the US utility and energy sectors, the labor force presents distinct gender disparities, and in Spain, while there is a relatively gender-balanced participation in the solar sector, the pay gap between men and women remains. Furthermore, according to the Solar Foundation, women and racial minorities make up a smaller share of the solar workforce than of the overall US economy. When we refer to a just transition away from fossil fuels, we must challenge new industries to also transition away from prevailing power structures and a sexually disaggregated labor force. Within this, it is important to be also aware of intersectional realities, particularly with regards to the intersections of gender, race and class disparities.

A gender just transition must further take into account the role of women’s unpaid care work, particularly in developing countries, as well as women’s informal work, both of which in essence subsidize our current economic systems and are financially unrecognized or undervalued. The precariousness of women’s work is compounded by current trends such as seasonal and forced migration, the feminization of agricultural labor, the lack of formal recognition for women as farmers, the lack of health protections in the informal sector, the transportation of women in Qatar and the Arab peninsula, among others. Women entrepreneurs are also disproportionately represented in small enterprises, which have less access to credit and loans, and in the micro and small informal sector. As feminists in the labor movement denounce, while working conditions in general are poor in many industries, they are often worse for women.

From a policy perspective, in order to catalyze a gender just transition, one option is to establish a gender quota for the renewable energy sector. It is also crucial to build the capacities of female workers, and to ensure an inclusive work environment that provides, for example, childcare services, work-life balance, and family friendly spaces. Other relevant social services include ensuring an income in case of hardship, and giving money back to women who engage in multiple forms of labor, as is the case in Brazil. Bottom-up, union-led initiatives are working to ensure these and other kinds of gender just conditions in workplaces worldwide. As Anabella Rosemberg states, if jobs are good, people will want them.

Women's and feminist organizations in the climate advocacy space are also spearheading awareness and advocacy efforts to call for a gender just transition, and as part of this work have defined criteria for existing projects and businesses that can be characterized as exemplary Gender Just Solutions. Gender Just Solutions are bottom-up, and can be mitigation and/or adaptation initiatives that are efficient, decentralized, safe, appropriate, affordable, sustainable, replicable, interlinked to peace building, promote equal access to benefits, do not burden women, entail multiple benefits, and center local decision making and the role of women within it.

Prevailing legal climate frameworks increasingly refer to the relevance of gender equality. The preamble of the Paris Agreement, while broad in focus, mentions the importance of upholding human rights, rights to health, rights of indigenous people and local communities, migrants, children, and persons with disabilities and in vulnerable situations, as well as of women. The Green Climate Fund and the Climate Technology Center and Network also have overall principles regarding gender-responsive finance and technology. It is under these policy frameworks that dialogue and action on gender just transitions must be undertaken and called for, though more detailed and clear policy directives on the matter are also further needed.

The global finance landscape and implementation of gender just transitions

New modalities of financing should be promoted at the international and national level to create the environment for decentralized and distributed energy access, and to ensure women and men's full and equal participation. Financing for climate justice and other forms of equitable social transitions means thinking about the use of financial instruments, most of which flow from multilateral development banks. Under a climate justice approach, which cannot be conceptualized without gender equality and other disparities between and within countries, there is currently a large disconnect between what the needs are, what is being provided, and how.

One of the challenges faced is regarding the comparability of developed countries' accounting and reporting of climate finance. Developing countries, such as Bali, have called for climate finance to be adequate, predictable, new and additional; that is, money has to be provided on top of the development assistance that is already being delivered. The question of allocation and balance between adaptation and mitigation is also part of a gender just approach to climate financing, as is the issue of constricting categorizations. For example, currently money that has to be loaned for climate resiliency cannot be used for the transitional productive systems that a gender just transition calls for. Another challenge that must be addressed is the lack of capacity on behalf of developing countries to apply for climate financing.

Current finance provisions for climate justice and just transitions are also low in part because options to finance smaller-scale projects are limited. Under a feminist, intersectional approach, supporting community groups to lead locally relevant just transition initiatives is important, yet small grants approaches are currently under-resourced and underutilized, such as those of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Civil society representatives in the Green Climate Fund (GCF) are currently discussing how to reach scale by replicating small grants programs, for example if 100 countries had funds of \$100,000 to give out to groups on the ground as simple, accessible funding for concrete measures. To ensure this, there is a need for new models of intermediation between large funds and community groups, in addition to the need to address structural barriers such as missing collateral.

Intermediation requires building the capacity of an actor who is then supposed to reach local groups. It is often an extra layer that must be added – for example, the IFC has a corporation that transmits back to a domestic firm that then makes funds usable to local groups. The intermediary must receive the money on behalf of community groups, have certain fiduciary and legal standards, absorb the reporting and accounting burden on grants, and ultimately spread the money. This requires a more engaged form of intermediation than currently predominates, which also implies higher transaction fees. While each layer of intermediation adds transaction costs –an average of which is 8% of the sum grant-, effective and accountable intermediation can sustain the development of local capacity.

Much of the conversation on financing the transition focuses on climate finance, but we must also remember that the landscape is much larger. Wall Street is dis-incentivized from looking at the long term and from considering alternative financing approaches. For example, a 0.05% tax on financial movements can generate as much as 1.5 trillion dollars over a decade. To be able to access adequate funding in the face of climate change, tax havens and tax avoidance must also be countered, as they lead to the loss of astronomical amounts of public financing.

Conclusions

As Liane Schalatek reminds us, actions towards a just transition are already happening, though they may not have the label of climate action or just transitions. For example, GIUCCI or the Gender Inter Urban Climate Change Initiative is addressing the gap on gender and urban policies, working with women's groups to track adaptation and mitigation efforts from a gender lens, and building the capacities of cities and national governments. As a representative of GIUCCI describes, we must not talk about the co-benefits of initiatives like these, but rather of the benefits, as that is what they are for women on the ground. Like this group, multiple constituencies, organizations and civil society collectives are demanding that the transition away from fossil fuels also be a transition away from the inequalities that currently characterize our societies – in terms of gender disparities, but also class, race, ability and many more intersecting forms of discrimination. As the climate crisis exacerbates already existing inequalities, it is fundamental to consider business-as-usual not only in terms of the economic and political power of current fossil fuel industries, but also in terms of the social aspects of what business-as-usual looks like, which is an unequal world. As Anabella Rosemberg states, the transition cannot be towards climate chaos, but away from business-as-usual, and towards justice. Justice is a political decision, and as such requires people mobilizing towards it at all levels, from the grassroots to the international. There can be no jobs, no life, and no communities on a dead planet. It is imperative to act in this regard within climate finance, climate policy, and climate action debates and plans at the global, national and local level.