

61st Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61)

The 61st Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61)'s priority theme was 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work', presenting an opportunity to introduce the concept of just and equitable transition in the context of climate change.

In February 2017, UN Women and UNESCAP held a regional expert group meeting, inviting delegates from relevant government ministries who were to attend CSW61, and several members of Asia Pacific civil society and trade union movements. The outcome document⁷ of this meeting included the following recommendation:

55. Ensure that the transition to low-carbon economies incorporates a **just and equitable transition of the workforce** by encouraging productive technological change in support of decent work in the public and private sector for women, especially in the area of climate change mitigation and adaptation. In this regard, recognise that a just and equitable transition to low carbon economies may support decent work opportunities for women, while redistributing care work.

At the CSW61 itself, the Women's Rights Caucus proposed that language relating to climate change and just and equitable transition was necessary to secure decent work and a sustainable planet for women. Negotiations with official delegations until the final hours led to the following inclusion in the Agreed Conclusions operational paragraphs:

40. hh. Develop and adopt gender-responsive strategies on mitigation and adaptation to climate change, in line with international and regional instruments, to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls to respond to the adverse effects of climate change, with the aim to strengthen their economic empowerment, through inter alia, the promotion of their health and well being, as well as access to sustainable livelihoods, including **in the context of a just transition of the workforce**;⁸

⁷ Asia and Pacific Policy Dialogue on 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work': Summary report of recommendations, p. 8 www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Asia-Pacific%20Policy%20Dialogue%20Meeting%20Summary%20Report.pdf

⁸ Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work: 2017 Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions, p. 13 www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/61/csw-conclusions-61-web.pdf?la=en&ndvs=5452

Inclusion of Global Unions statement in Human Rights Council report of the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order

In 2017, the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Alfred de Zayas, submitted his annual report to the Human Rights Council. The focus of his report was on the impact of the financial and economic policies pursued by international organizations and other institutions, in particular the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, on a democratic and equitable international order. Included in the Annexes is a statement from Global Unions to the 2017 Spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank, which states:

14. A zero-carbon, zero-poverty future is possible through a coherent response to the social, economic and climate challenges facing our world. The influence and financial resources of the IFIs are necessary to reach this future through a **just and equitable transition**. The conversion to a sustainable economy can be a net creator of jobs, but the substantial economic changes involved could leave workers behind and create further inequality. The danger of unemployment, forced migration and rising energy costs loom over working people.⁹

⁹ Report of the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order to the 36th session of the Human Rights Council (11-29 September 2017) A/HRC/36/40 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/218/37/PDF/G1721837.pdf?OpenElement>

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For more information about our campaign for a Feminist Fossil Fuel Free Future, please visit www.apwld.org



A Feminist Interpretation of Just and Equitable Transitions in the Context of Climate Change



*Patriarchal, neoliberal capitalism caused climate change. Our aim is a **Just and Equitable Transition** to new, gender-just, economic, political and social relationships in a world free from climate change. Our aim is a **Feminist Fossil Fuel Free Future!***

Climate change poses one of the largest threat to women's human rights, and indeed to human existence, that humanity has faced. The current increase of 1°C degree has already caused devastating impacts, particularly to the lives of women in most affected countries. The Paris Agreement, signed in December 2015 and touted as the global framework that will prevent catastrophic climate change, includes a commitment to make efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C by the end of the century. Yet, without commitments to **transition away from our fossil fuel based economic system** member states' commitments are currently leading to a devastating 3.6°C increase.

The Paris Agreement also commits governments to take into account "the **imperatives of a just transition** of the workforce ...". The concept of a **just and equitable transition** provides us with a unique opportunity to **re-design societies in ways that are equitable, just and sustainable: an opportunity to build a Feminist Fossil Fuel Free Future**¹. But the climate transition is also an opportunity for capitalists, for arms manufacturers, for patriarchal power. This briefer is designed to provide an introduction to the concept of just and equitable transitions and prompt discussions on the ways feminists can shape it.

¹ APWLD's briefer on a **Feminist Fossil Fuel Free Future**: http://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/5Fs_briefer_v2.pdf

What does a 'Just Transition' mean?

Originating from the trade union movement, a just transition usually refers to ensuring justice for workers displaced by environmental or climate policy changes. The concept has been part of a strategy to encourage energy sector unions to support climate action that can also be in the interests of their members. It has included labour movement demands for greener jobs, social protection for workers in affected industries, retraining and social dialogue. But there are also calls, amongst the labour movement and civil society, for a more transformative approach to just transitions - a transition that addresses the injustices embedded within neoliberal capitalism. These transformative demands look not just at the individual workers impacted but at ways to transition to work that is dignified and builds worker power, that creates socialised energy and focuses on employment creation in ways that will be socially beneficial.



A transformative vision toward 'Just and Equitable Transitions'

The “**just and equitable transition**” represents the transition demanded through calls for “system change, not climate change”, a transition away from a consumption-based, extractive and exploitative economy. A truly transformative transition requires systemic shifts in global economic governance as well as changes to national fiscal and monetary policies. It will require the restoration of the capacity of states to regulate in the public interest without being aggravated by investor protections within preferential trade agreements, debt obligations or world trade organisation limitations. Transitioning to new economies should also feature moves to **energy democracy**² and restoration of public goods, public services and public sector employment that has been demonstrated to advance women’s human rights as well as safeguard the environment. A transformative transition must challenge the primacy of money as the driving value in organising our economy and could even enable shifts from waged labour to workers cooperatives and other forms of social solidarity economies.

A transformative approach also recognises that climate change is disproportionately impacting workers and communities that are already the most vulnerable and exploited in the current economic model. In the Philippines, for example, the increasing move to the contractualisation and casualisation of labour means that women in the flood zones of metro Manila are regularly unpaid when floods and typhoons make it impossible to work.

How could a Just and Equitable Transition be feminist?

A **just and equitable transition** should address inequalities within our economic systems and recognise that a transition of the economy must have gender equitable benefits. Adding a feminist perspective to the concept provides the opportunity to completely rethink the very basis of the existing, imbalanced and exploitative global economy and address the gendered division of labour that underpins neoliberal capitalism. To that end, a just and equitable transition must recognise that women’s unpaid work sustains the existing economy and that growth has depended on the low wages of women in commonly low emission, yet insecure and informal employment, including subsistence farming, service industries, domestic and care work.

One way to address unpaid work is to **reduce the number of hours in a normal working week** allowing us to **redistribute both paid and unpaid work** and recognise that sustainable living takes time. With longer working hours we can all contribute to care work, to food production and to social and political life. There is no doubt that this is possible as increased productivity should have enabled this reduction already. Instead that increased productivity resulted in larger profits and CEO wages.

² See more at: <http://energydemocracyinitiative.org/>

Another way to recognise and redistribute care work is to prioritise **public funding of care**. A low-carbon, just economy that deals with climate disruption and upholds human rights will require an enormous increase in health and care workers, for example. Aging demographics, increasing disasters as well as the enormous unmet health needs of the majority of the world mean that health and care workers will be essential. To achieve for the whole world population the kind of health rights we are entitled to, Jayati Ghosh estimates, we would need 663 million health workers, 340 million childcare workers and 86 million aged care workers by 2030, more than half in Asia.³ If we can ensure their work is valued through living wages, secure contracts, strong education, collective bargaining rights, women would benefit as workers, through the redistribution of care work and through improving their own health and care rights.

A **universal basic income**, or ‘social wage’ could also feature in a “just and equitable” transition. When people are provided with sufficient resources to live a dignified life, they are able to contribute to sustainable living in more directive, conscious ways and labour becomes more highly valued. A universal basic income would also provide women with autonomy to make decisions about their lives and play a role in limiting economic dependency.

The concept of **energy democracy** features in the transformative version of just transitions as it prioritises energy for communities, rather than for industry, and gives communities decisions over whether they want to use resources in their community for energy. Micro solar, micro hydro and other small energy systems are more often owned by and benefit women and can reduce unpaid work collective fuel. Centralised systems are generally designed for profit and consequently result in burning as much fossil fuel at the cheapest rate for industry.

The **redistribution of land** is also critical to a just and equitable transition. Industrial farming, logging and other land monopolies are large contributors to climate change. Small land-holdings by women using agro-ecology principles can improve both soil sequestration and prevent erosion and other degradation through pollutants. When women are given equal rights to land holding and inputs yields grow and can prevent deforestation⁴.

³ The Hindu: ‘Care work: the future of work’ 15 August 2016 <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/c-p-chandrasekhar/care-work-the-future-of-work/article8991300.ece>

⁴ Project Drawdown: ‘Women Smallholders’ <http://www.drawdown.org/solutions/women-and-girls/women-smallholders>



Internationally agreed text

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

In 2013 the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution and set of conclusions concerning decent work, sustainable development and ‘green jobs’ and put forward a policy framework for a just transition.

The subsequent paper from the ILO group meeting proposed:

“A **just transition** for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy, needs to be well managed and contribute to the goals of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty.”⁵

⁵ International Labor Organization: Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all” (2015) http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf, p.4

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

An expert group meeting on gender and climate change, convened prior to the Paris negotiations, recommended that policies to secure just and equitable transitions be further developed:

The concept of ‘just transitions’ traces back to trade union advocacy when job losses were experienced as economies moved from fossil fuel to renewables. **The concept, however, could have broader applications, including in regards to the sexual division of labour and changes to women’s work more broadly.** The need for transformational systemic change for climate justice provides opportunities to re-think the current sexual division of labour and promote decent work for women in under-valued fields such as care work; the (social) service sector; sustainable, locally-focused agriculture and fisheries; as well as locally governed renewable energies with women participating equally as shareholders, owners and fairly-remunerated workers. In such contexts, just and equitable transitions need to be gender-sensitive and transformative.⁶

Strong advocacy from trade unions and allies secured the inclusion of a “just transition” into the Paris agreement. Its preamble states:

“Taking into account **the imperatives of a just transition** of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities...”.

However women’s rights advocates wanted that concept to be broadened and to commit to planned transitions that address the sexual division of labour and imagines economies that are more gender equitable and sustainable for all people.

The Gender Decision adopted at COP 22 provides for a Gender Action Plan (GAP) to be adopted at COP 23. In May 2016, during the intersessional climate change negotiations, one of the subsidiary bodies of the UNFCCC convened a workshop to identify the possible elements of the GAP. Women’s rights advocates and ILO representatives pushed for the inclusion of the just and equitable transitions as one of the elements of the GAP. The report of this workshop, though not an official negotiating document but which will nonetheless inform the negotiations, includes two references to just transition with a gender perspective:

“Coordination of joint events and activities on the linkages between gender, climate change and other thematic areas, such as food, security, human rights, **just transition and decent work**, health at UN agencies and at national level;

...
Hosting Host knowledge dialogues on **gender considerations in the context of just transition and decent work**, and economic diversification.”

On these grounds, women’s groups are ready to advocate for the integration of just and equitable transitions as an element of a the GAP to be adopted at COP 23.

⁶ UN Women, UN DESA, UNFCCC: Report of the Expert Group Meeting, ‘Implementation of gender-responsive climate action in the context of sustainable development’ November 2015 https://unfccc.int/files/gender_and_climate_change/application/pdf/egm-report_bonn_final_25_november_2015.pdf, pp. 6-7