



PARLIAMENT  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# *JUST* TRANSITION

WEBINAR ON A JUST TRANSITION TO A  
LOW CARBON, CLIMATE RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE  
ECONOMY AND A JUST SOCIETY

**Feedback And Recommendations Report  
Intergovernmental And Resource Matters Cluster  
Just Transition Webinar Series, Volume 1**

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The National Development Plan (NDP), which was adopted in 2012, sets out the vision and framework for pursuing radical socio-economic transformation in South Africa. It sets key priorities for Government to eradicate poverty by 2030 and substantially reduce unemployment and inequality. The NDP commits South Africa to transitioning to a society that is just, inclusive, sustainable and resilient through Chapter 5, titled transition to a low-carbon economy.

The NDP envisages that by 2030 South Africa will have made headway in transitioning to a society that is just, inclusive, sustainable and resilient. It thus set out a framework and guiding principles to ensure that by 2030 South Africa's transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable economy and society will be well underway. The NDP acknowledges that the country's commitment towards reducing its carbon footprint presents challenges for the economy, which will require the design of a more sustainable development path.

Transitioning to a sustainable and resilient economy and society will require systemic and structural changes that should also see the use of South Africa's natural resources, including water, land and energy, resulting in appropriate economic and social development that addresses the country's triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment. This is in line with the NDPs call for special protection

for poor and vulnerable people against the costs associated with the transition, such as rising food, transport and energy prices, as well as job losses that will likely occur due to new skills required.

It is worth noting that there is consensus that the Just Transition will mainly occur through the energy sector. This is due to the fact that South Africa's electricity is generated from coal combustion. In fact, 80% of South Africa's electricity is generated from coal, while the remaining 20% comes from other sources, such as wind, solar, hydro and others. This means that the South African economy is driven by fossil fuel-based energy for both production, manufacturing and transportation, among many other services. Ultimately, the South African Just Transition will in all likelihood follow the Energy Just Transition pathway.

It is against this background and pursuant to Parliament's Knowledge Management Strategy that the Parliamentary Research Unit hosted a webinar on 28 October 2021 under the theme *Is Just Transition a Pipe Dream in Light of the Slow Economic Growth?* The vexed question that participants faced during the webinar was whether a Just Transition to a low carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable economy and just society remains a pipedream for South Africa, given the country's slow economic growth. The webinar placed Parliament at the apex of the planning and



implementation of a Just Transition. It emphasised the importance of an activist Parliament that is responsive to people's needs and promotes equality.

All speakers reiterated that a just transition requires decisive leadership that knows what they do not know. In this regard, Parliamentarians should be capacitated to understand all dimensions of the Just Transition to enable them to conduct oversight from an informed position. The webinar also revealed that a Just Transition may be a pipe dream in light of the slow economic growth in South Africa.

This document provides feedback on what transpired during the webinar, as well as to highlight some recommendations with regard to the role of Parliament in the implementation of the Just Transition.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATIONS ON THE JUST TRANSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA



The webinar, which was facilitated by Water and Sanitation sector specialist Mr Thomani Manungufala, assumed the form of a panel discussion, consisting of external experts who provided a factual background on the dimensions of the Just Transition. These presenters were:

- **Professor Mthunzi Mdwaba** - The first African IOE Vice-President to the ILO, Global Spokesperson for Employers; Vice Chairperson of the Governing Body and IOE's Chairperson for Business Human Rights & Responsible Business Conduct. [Focus Area – Just Transition and Future of Work].
- **Dr Stanley Semelane** - (Renewable energy expert) Senior Researcher Climate Change Services at Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) [Focus Area – Dimensions of Just Transition – Technical Presentation].
- **Professor Thuli Madonsela** - Law Trust

Chair in Social Justice and Law Professor at the University of Stellenbosch and Former Public Protector [Focus Area – Implications of Just Transition on Social Justice].

- **Ms Katlego Ncongwane** – Lead Scientist: Health Application Research, South African Weather Services. [Focus Area - The Impact of Air Pollution on Public Health]

Internal presenters included the managers of the Knowledge and Information Services (Dr Leon Gabriel) and the Core Business Support (Ms Ressida Begg) Divisions, who contextualised the Just Transition within the Knowledge Management Strategy and Oversight and Accountability Model of Parliament, respectively. Whilst the intention was for a panel of researchers in the Intergovernmental and Resource Matters Cluster (Ms Nontobeko Qwabe, Ms Tembisa Siyo-Pepeteka, Mr Nhlanhla Ginindza) to respond to issues



raised by the external experts and/or raise brief discussion points on some of the questions posed during the webinar, time constraints prevented them from doing so. This section nonetheless provides an overview of both the presentations by the invited speakers (external experts and Division Managers), as well as challenges and recommendations raised by the internal researchers.

## 2.1 ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE PRESENTATIONS

The vexed question for discussion during the

webinar was whether a Just Transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable economy and society remains a pipedream for South Africa, given the country's slow economic growth.

In general, the discussion revealed that the Just Transition will affect all dimensions of society at varying degrees of severity. In other words, it will have both environmental, social and economic impacts and opportunities. The Just Transition will have implications for Food and Water Security; Social Justice; Future of Work; Public Health; and Governance.



Discussions confirmed that a Just Transition may be a pipe dream in light of the slow economic growth in South Africa. It noted that the country will have to rely on funding outside of the national revenue fund. The high unemployment rate and increasing inequality in the country constrain the ability of the Government to transition to a low carbon economy. Parliament should be at the forefront of the implementation of the Just Transition by



*Dr Stanley Semelane*

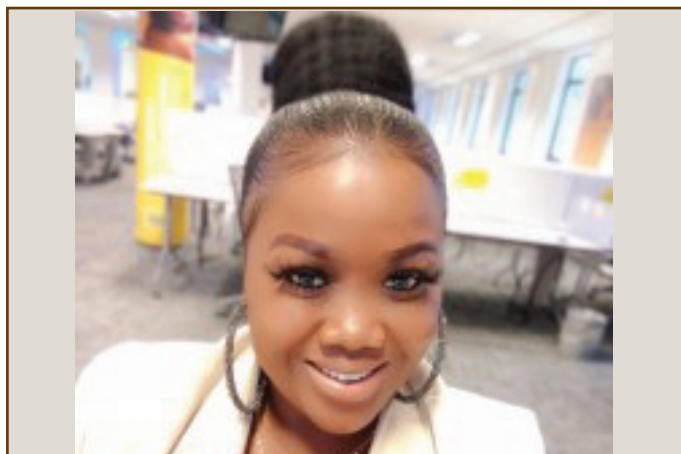
holding those responsible for its implementation accountable and ensuring that no one is left behind.

- *Knowledge Management*

**Dr L. Gabriel**, Manager of the Knowledge and Information Services Division and custodian of Parliament's Knowledge Management Strategy, noted that the main aim of the strategy is to develop knowledge and capacitate the parliamentary populace in general and Members of Parliament in particular. The webinar series is one of the mechanisms to deliver on this mandate. He emphasised that knowledge and capacity development will play a critical role in the refinement of the Oversight and Accountability Model and its subsequent implementation.

- *Dimensions of a Just Transition*

**Dr S. Semelane**, expert on renewable energy from the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) indicated that whilst the Just Transition will affect various sectors, such as transport, agriculture, human settlements and mining, it will mainly impact the energy sector in South Africa. Furthermore, to enable

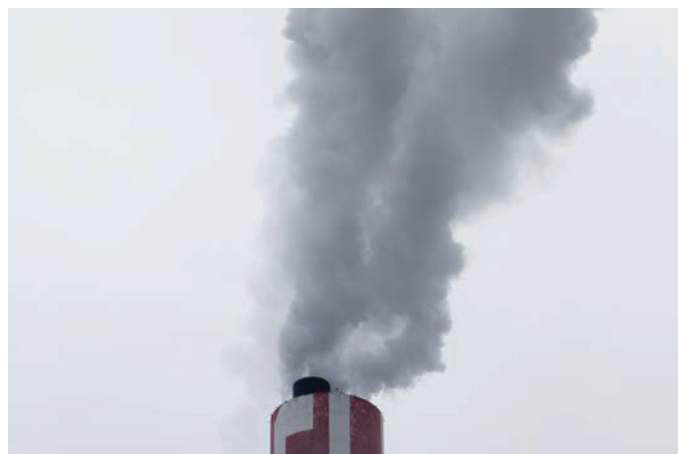


*Ms Katlego Ncongwane*

a just energy transition, green investment and a just transition energy fund should be established. The green investment should adopt a shared-value principle that will create value for communities while the just transition energy fund will address the socio-economic impacts that might arise from the transition. In addition, potential losers in the energy transition, such as coal sector workers, need to be protected. This fund can contribute to social protection plans for these workers and other affected parties.

- *The impact of air pollution on public health*

**Ms Katlego Ncongwane**, lead scientist in health application research from the South African Weather Service, delivered a presentation on the devastating effects of poor air quality (air pollution) on the health and wellbeing of people. She reported that approximately seven million people die from air pollution every year. Poor air quality is also linked to many diseases, such as diabetes, stroke and lung cancer. Therefore, a Just Transition could save lives, as it would eliminate greenhouse gas emissions and other airborne pollutants, which negatively affect human health.



*Professor Mthunzi Mdwaba*

- *The future of work*

**Professor M. Mdwaba**, chairperson of Productivity South Africa, noted that a Just Transition will have a profound impact on the future of work. He submitted that the Transition should focus on the people and that prudent leadership will be paramount. The Just Transition will create a new world of work where new skills, new jobs and new ways of doing things will be required. Technology will define the future of work in the era of Just Transition. However, the Just Transition should not transform the lives of people by impacting their quality of life negatively. To this end, a new approach is required that involves additional innovative and creative tools to intervene, arrived at through dialogue and consultation.



*Professor Thuli Madonsela*



- *Social Justice*

**Professor Thuli Madonsela**, Law Trust Chair in Social Justice, Law Professor at the University of Stellenbosch and Former Public Protector, emphasised the centrality of social justice in the implementation of the Just Transition. She defined social justice as the enjoyment of all rights and freedoms by every person, and a reflection of just, fair and equitable redistribution of all resources. Professor Madonsela noted the importance of the Just Transition ensuring that economic growth happens in a socially just manner, in line with the Constitution. This means that everyone counts. Therefore, in addressing climate change, Parliament should use its mandate to advance equality in whatever is being done and ensure redistribution of resources to all. Previously disadvantaged people should not be the losers in the new renewal energy opportunities created in their towns. The Just Transition is an investment in peace, as it will help to address poverty, hunger and inequality, which are the main underlying causes of civil unrest.

- *The role of Parliament in overseeing the Just Transition*

**Ms R. Begg**, manager of the Core Business Support Division, highlighted a number of prerequisites that should be in place to ensure effective outcomes-based oversight of the Just Transition. These include effective oversight mechanisms to promote a transparent and accountable executive; effective oversight systems to promote a culture of integration, coherence, collaboration and cooperation amongst committees; programming of targeted focus areas with a view to ensuring that committees collaborate on matters of common interest. Furthermore, Members and staff should have a common understanding of especially chapter 5 of the National Development Plan, which contains the country's vision for transition to a low-carbon economy, and its linkages to the relevant development agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. The Oversight and Accountability Model of Parliament is in the process of being refined and re-focussed to enhance oversight and accountability by Government, as well as to ensure integrated oversight.

**The recording and copies of presentations are accessible on the parliamentary website: <https://tinyurl.com/z7dejpe6>**



- *Access to natural resources*

**Ms T. Siyo-Pepeteka, Ms N. Qwabe and Mr N. Ginindza**, land, agriculture and fisheries sector specialists in the Parliamentary Research Unit, provided a holistic overview of contemporary challenges facing South Africa. Chief among them are governance, access to and utilisation of natural resources. Access to water in the country is currently inequitable. A large proportion of people do not have access to clean water in their homes and are dependent on either a communal water point or other sources, such as rivers, which are often polluted. At the same time, water-intensive industries, often related to fossil fuel extraction and processing and agriculture, use significantly more than their fair share of water. Wastewater is also seldom sufficiently treated before being discharged into the environment, while water recycling is rare.

Unequal distribution of land and inequitable land uses perpetuate poverty and inequality. In fact, the land reform process is very slow. Unsustainable practices in both agriculture and mining result in carbon emissions, poor local air quality, and compromised ecosystems, which ultimately impoverish communities. Economic activities associated with, among others, agriculture and mining, along with a growing population and increased urbanisation, compete with the conservation of biodiversity. The mining of rare earth elements to provide for the manufacturing of goods and services for a just transition to a low carbon economy, such as solar panels, batteries and associated electronic items, could lead to a myriad of negative impacts on the natural environment.

Unplanned urbanisation and urban sprawl have resulted in spatial inequalities with unaffordable transport costs, especially for those living far from



economic opportunities. Furthermore, little attention is paid to food security and opportunities for local food production. Food production and consumption are unsustainable, exacerbated by the distance that food has to travel. Human consumption and the use of non-biodegradable products have also resulted in the need for more landfill sites.

The issues of capacity, knowledge and skills in Government are critical for the successful planning, management and implementation of a Just Transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable economy and society. However, by its own admission, challenges of corruption, poor governance and lack of accountability and transparency inhibit Government's efforts to provide strong, coordinated and aligned institutional and policy direction, creating an unpredictable investment and development environment. This, in turn, negatively impacts Government's efforts to deliver inclusive basic services to the poor.

In closing, **Ms E. Saptoe**, Senior Researcher responsible for the Intergovernmental and Resources Matters Cluster, remarked that this webinar marks the beginning of a knowledge and capacity development process towards deeper scrutiny and insights for effective oversight by Parliament. She further noted that the focus of the webinar

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Parliament serve as enablers to facilitate a just transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and sustainable economy and society. Its vision is to be an activist and responsive people’s Parliament that improves the quality of life of South Africans and ensures enduring equality in society. This vision finds expression in a mission to represent the people and to ensure government by the people in fulfilling its constitutional functions of passing laws and overseeing executive action. In this regard, Parliament should consider the following recommendations:

### 3.1 CAPACITY BUILDING

The Just Transition is a new concept that is not yet fully understood. As noted during the webinar, enabling Parliament to effectively exercise oversight of the transition requires skills, knowledge, data and understanding of the concept. It is thus recommended that Members of Parliament embark

was deliberately on the future of work and social justice, as the impact of a Just Transition will be felt acutely by all sectors of society if it is not done in a manner that is fair, equitable and transparent. The debate on Just Transition will continue through the webinar series and reports will be produced for Members of Parliament to inform them of the oversight implications for Parliament. The vision and mission of the Sixth Democratic



on targeted workshops or training programmes on all dimensions of the Just Transition to enable them to identify appropriate areas of oversight, conduct oversight and legislate with the requisite knowledge and insight, where required. This will be in line with the strategic plan of Parliament and its associated knowledge management strategy. Parliament should also consider participating in streamlining the regulatory environment and modelling beyond the formulation of legislation, by hosting relevant colloquiums and workshops.

### 3.2 INTEGRATED OVERSIGHT AND LAW MAKING PROCESS

The NDP acknowledges that poor and vulnerable people will be disproportionately affected by the Just Transition. It thus demands that the transitioning process be approached cautiously. Moreover, the NDP calls for special protection for this part of the population against the costs associated with the transition, such as rising food, transport and energy prices, as well as job losses that will likely occur due to new skills required. It thus becomes clear that ensuring that the country's transition to a low-carbon economy happens in a judicious manner calls for integrated oversight that encapsulates all its different dimensions.

Further, the implementation of the Just Transition programme should be informed by procedural, distributive and restorative justice. This means that Parliament should use its oversight and public participation functions to ensure that Just Transition programmes and/or projects are consultative and inclusive by including marginalised groups in decision-making. It should be clear from the onset who will reap the benefits, who will pay and how these responsibilities will be distributed.



In addition, the oversight and law making process of Parliament should consider past, present and future damage caused to individuals, communities and the natural environment. Moreover, legislation on the Just Transition should provide opportunities to improve the situations of disenfranchised communities. So, for example, there should be clear plans on how coal mine workers will be protected from job losses when coal mines are closed. In the same vein, practical plans should be put in place to indicate how renewable energy projects would improve access to energy or benefit the communities at large.

Finally, the era of the law that seeks to protect the environment without taking into consideration the needs of the people should cease. The law should provide for both environmental protection and social justice. This can only be achieved through integrated parliamentary processes.



Parliament should thus consider enhancing the effectiveness of its oversight and accountability function by improved cooperation with relevant stakeholders, such as provincial legislatures, non-governmental organisations, Think Tanks and civil society. For example, Members of Parliament based in specific provinces and local stakeholders can conduct regular oversight without waiting for sector-specific Committees to visit those areas.

### 3.3 ACCESS TO AND GOVERNANCE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Presidential Panel on Climate Change recommends that land reform must contribute towards the achievement of a ‘just transition’ to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy by promoting sustainable land-use practices in ways that create jobs and livelihoods, as well as responding to climate variability and ensure the restoration of protected areas. People depend on land-based natural resources such as food, shelter, water and medicines for their livelihoods.

However, the unsustainable use of land unfortunately results in land degradation, with agriculture being a dominant sector in driving land degradation through unsustainable agricultural practices. Mining is a further major contributor to land degradation, as it often leaves land that is contaminated and un-rehabilitated at the end of the mine’s lifecycle, which becomes unusable. Land degradation has not only generated a significant amount of greenhouse gas emissions, but has also resulted in local people losing a valuable livelihood asset. To address these and other challenges identified during the webinar, the following recommendations are made:



- *Equitable Access to Land*

Parliament should use its legislative and oversight functions to ensure that policy and laws passed, as well as administrative practices by the Executive, promote equitable access to land for agriculture, housing and livelihoods.

- *Tenure Security*

Parliament should pass laws or enhance existing laws to improve tenure security that will encourage adaptation in the land sector. Tenure arrangements should not be limited to freehold rights, but also access rights to resources to ensure adaptation strategies, such as mobility and migration, are not impeded.

- *Integrated Development Plans (IDPs)*

Parliament should consider using its legislative function to review the core components that should be contained in Integrated Development Plans, as contained in the Municipal Systems Act, with a view to ensuring that spatial planning becomes a mandatory component of IDPs, as stated in the guidelines for land use management. Further, land use planning should be contextualised within the IDP objectives.

- *Economic Development and Poverty Eradication Strategies*

Parliament should use its oversight function to ensure that when departments present their economic development and poverty eradication strategies, these encourage livelihood diversification strategies, which are essential to address land use change and its associated impacts. For example, strategies should include a focus on ensuring that communities earn income from other activities, such as eco-tourism and other non-farming activities.

- *Investment in Research and Development*

Parliament should use its oversight function to ensure that relevant departments, through their strategic plans and budgets, facilitate investment in research and development on the impact of climate change on the land use sector and possible mitigation and adaptation strategies. The key goal of climate research is to reduce uncertainty associated with climate change and provide timely and relevant information to inform planning processes and develop appropriate adaptation responses.

- *Mine Rehabilitation and Land Care Programme*

Parliament should use its monitoring and oversight, as well as representation functions to lobby the relevant department/s to plan and budget for major mine rehabilitation and land care programme initiatives. This will help with job creation and supporting livelihood opportunities in communities while addressing ecological damage.



### 3.4 COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Parliament should engage the relevant department/s to conduct cost-benefit analysis studies across the economy of South Africa that will determine the indirect effects and costs of food and energy production on the broader goals of environmental sustainability, social cohesion and the Just Transition.

### 3.5 RE-SKILLING AND JOB CREATION

Parliament should use its oversight function to ensure that re-skilling and sustainable job creation projects are piloted in the coal value chain and associated businesses in an inclusive and consultative manner to assess costs and benefits prior to wholesale exit in coal-driven economic activities.



### 3.6 TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Relevant departments should create interactive dashboards to improve transparency and accountability that will factor in key indicators on Just Transition. Parliament could then use its oversight mechanisms to assess whether commitments are realistic and deliver on objectives. This approach will improve access to information for interested and affected stakeholders.

### 3.7 STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE

Proper implementation of the Just Transition will require that governance in the public sector is strengthened and that corrective action and consequence management to deter or eliminate deviations is implemented. Parliament should consider working closely with the South African Local Government Association, Department of Public Service and Administration, Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation and the office of the Auditor-General to ensure better governance, particularly at provincial and local government levels, by addressing identified shortcomings.

JUST TRANSITION

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