

Global (Dis)Order
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Towards an orderly and just global energy transition

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Abstract

It is ever more apparent that ambitious climate goals cannot be met without orchestrated efforts to support a fair phase out of fossil fuels. This paper explores both mini-lateral 'club' and multilateral approaches to a global transition away from fossil fuels amid the challenge of both providing an ordered and just transition while disrupting the power and control that incumbent fossil interests wield over energy and political systems to inhibit such transitions. It explores the potential and limits of phase out clubs and the growing momentum behind calls for a new international treaty to regulate and limit the production of fossil fuels in order to support such a transition.

Introduction

The world's energy system is in crisis. Heavily dependent on climate change-inducing fossil fuels, characterised by vast inequalities in production and consumption within and between countries, and closely linked to war and economic turbulence, energy is at the heart of many of the most pressing challenges the world faces. Yet the global governance of a transition to a more secure, accessible, and sustainable energy order is under-developed and understudied (Newell et al. 2023). For the purposes of this paper, a just transition is one that attends to the procedural and distributional elements of justice affected by efforts to steer society towards a lower carbon future, especially with regard to those living in energy poverty, those whose livelihoods are affected by and dependent on a fossil fuel economy, and the ways that potential tensions between simultaneously pursuing energy and climate justice are addressed (Newell & Mulvaney 2013). An assessment of the prospects for a just transition is critical to move beyond the status quo default of crisis-induced policy responses followed by backlash from excluded groups and largely unco-ordinated national responses to what is a quintessentially global challenge. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to explore mini-lateral and multilateral political and institutional pathways towards the required exit from fossil fuels.

Such pathways have to navigate a series of key tensions. Firstly, the tension between order and disruption. Traditionally, transitions are neither just nor orderly; indeed, to succeed they depend on the disruption and destabilisation of dominant sociotechnical regimes (Turnheim & Geels 2012). A just transition will require disrupting incumbent control over energy and governance systems while building governance processes supportive of globally just transitions. The need to address historical inequities and current injustices regarding differing contributions to the problem of climate change and uneven capacity to address it means this transition cannot be left to the disruptions brought about by shifts in the market alone, but rather requires action by states and international institutions to address the procedural and distributional dimensions of a just transition. Secondly, thus far major energy transitions have spanned decades or centuries (Smil 2016), yet these now need to be accelerated and scaled over a much shorter time frame to avoid surpassing critical climate thresholds. This presents novel governance challenges. Thirdly, this imperative of acceleration also produces potential tensions between the need for inclusive and deliberate public engagements to build ownership and social acceptance, which take time, and the need for speed (Newell et al. 2022). Acceleration without attention to justice is unlikely to get very far, as we have seen in orchestrated backlash from incumbent business actors and their allies in the media to measures imposed from above and in resistance by poorer developing countries to demands that they increase their climate ambitions in the absence of adequate finance that reflects differentiated historical responsibilities and vulnerabilities to climate change.

A just transition will require disrupting incumbent control over energy and governance systems while building governance processes supportive of globally just transitions.

The paper seeks to furnish a foundational diagnosis of the sources of the current disorderly energy transition, provide an analysis of current trajectories and initiatives, and propose alternative policy pathways which would build concretely on the limitations of the current landscape of energy governance.

The geopolitical landscape of energy transition

This is not a conducive moment for strengthened multilateralism, increased aid, or confronting inequalities, and systems of global energy governance, such as they exist, are considered weak and under-developed (Florini & Sovacool 2009). This unfolds against a wider context of rising populism, regional wars, trade wars, and the expansion of new frontiers of mineral exploitation that is required for the drive towards global electrification.

At the same time, it is now widely acknowledged by all major international institutions and most governments that unless the world accelerates its transition away from fossil fuels, the ambition of the Paris Agreement will not be realised. It was only in 2023 at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP28, after 30 years of negotiations, that the treaty body explicitly acknowledged the role of fossil fuels in the climate crisis. Countries were called upon to transition away from fossil fuels in a 'just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade', marking the 'beginning of the end' of the fossil fuels era (COP28 2023). This was based on clear evidence of not only an emissions gap (between the commitments governments have made and the scale of action required to deliver the Paris Agreement) but also a production gap (between planned fossil fuel extraction and production and what is compatible with remaining carbon budgets in line with a 1.5 or 2 degrees Celsius trajectory) (SEI et al. 2024). In other words, the goals of the Paris Agreement cannot be achieved amid the expanded production of fossil fuels.

The need to rapidly increase global ambition to tackle the climate crisis is not the only driver accelerating the transition from fossil fuels. Other key drivers include: (i) **Economic costs**, including concerns about stranded assets and systemic risks to financial stability, the costs of importing fossil fuels, price volatilities, and the cost of fossil fuel subsidies, which for G7 members reached a record high of USD 282 billion in 2023 (the last year for which estimates are available) (IISD 2025). Recent estimates predict a US\$ 17 trillion loss of revenue to the forty identified petrostates globally with a 'slow transition' and US\$ 8 trillion with a 'moderate transition' between 2023 and 2040 (Manley et al. 2023; Prince 2023, 18–19), which omits the substantially higher cost of not transitioning at all. The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts that demand for fossil fuels will peak this decade and begin to wane thereafter, meaning that supply may well exceed demand (IEA 2023). (ii) **Economic opportunities** associated with clean energy. 'Global energy transformation: A roadmap to 2050 by the International Renewable Energy Agency' (IRENA) finds that such a transformation would boost gross domestic product (GDP) by 2.5 per cent and total employment will peak at 0.2 per cent globally in 2035 and stabilise at 0.16% by 2050 and that health, subsidy, and climate-related savings would be worth up to USD 160 trillion cumulatively over a 30-year period. Hence, every dollar spent on transforming the global energy system provides a pay-off of at least USD 3 and potentially more than USD 7, depending on how externalities are valued (IRENA 2019). (iii) **Geopolitical drivers**, including the desires to reduce energy-system disruption, exposure to shocks, and dependence on volatile fossil fuel-producing nations. For example, Europe spent

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an extra €517–831 billion in excess market costs on fossil fuels due to higher prices throughout 2021–2022 in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Colgan et al. 2023). (iv) **Health impacts**. For example, the energy sector is the primary cause of the polluted air that more than 90 per cent of the world's population breathes, linked to more than 6 million premature deaths per year (IEA 2023). (v) **Environmental impacts** on energy systems. Impacts on energy sources and infrastructures are expected to 'multiply six-fold by mid-century and amount to more than 10 times the present damage of €3.4 billion per year by the end of the century due to climate change' (Forzieri et al. 2018). There are therefore multiple drivers converging around the need for an orderly and just exit from fossil fuels.

Future scenarios anticipate the loss of fossil fuel-related jobs will be more than compensated by the increase in transition-related employment.

Of course, the scale of the challenge of transitioning away from fossil fuels should not be underestimated. The IEA anticipates the share of coal, oil, and natural gas in the global energy supply will still be at 73 per cent by 2030 (IEA 2023). Investment in oil and gas today is almost double the level compatible with a net-zero emissions scenario in 2030, putting the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal out of reach. But change in the energy transition is underway – and accelerating. Renewables are set to contribute 80 per cent of new power capacity in 2030 according to the IEA's Stated Policies Scenario (STEPS), though there is scope for this to be surpassed (IEA 2023a). Future scenarios anticipate the loss of fossil fuel-related jobs will be more than compensated by the increase in transition-related employment. 'For every USD 1 spent on fossil fuels, USD 1.7 is now spent on clean energy. Five years ago, this ratio was 1:1' (IEA 2023a website). However, 'the increase in clean energy spending in recent years is ... heavily concentrated in a handful of countries' (China, EU, and the US in particular) (IEA 2023a website). In addition, 'competition for clean energy manufacturing and for supplies of critical minerals and metals is a major issue for the resilience of energy transitions' (IEA 2023a website).

The challenge for governments is to keep pace with these developments and manage them effectively. Fossil fuels are being increasingly out-competed by the declining costs of renewable alternatives or subject to global and regional pressures to reduce and eliminate their use. Yet many producer and consumer states feel ill-equipped to navigate the speed and scale of this shift, for which few precedents exist. Proactive planning and societal engagement are critical to anticipate and avoid significant economic and social disruption. In this regard, governments can benefit from support, capacity-building, and policy learning through multilateral institutions such as through the World Bank's 'Just Transition for All' initiative and the Climate Investment Fund's Just Transition Planning Toolbox as well as regionally through the EU's Just Transition Platform. International institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, IEA, International Labour Organization, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and IRENA have an important role to play in financing, co-ordinating, and building capacity for just transitions and enabling lesson learning among countries regarding strategies to support just transitions (Newell et al. 2023). But navigating these competing trends and ensuring that transitions are just will require greatly strengthened systems of energy governance. What form could such systems take?

The minilateral governance of energy transitions

There are a number of emerging initiatives and proposals to accelerate and co-ordinate transitions away from fossil fuels. The most prominent of these include Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) and 'climate clubs' such as the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA) and the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA). Many are consistent with the philosophy and approach which Naim (2009) and others call minilateralism, which suggests the ideal starting point for a collective response is the smallest number of countries with the greatest scope to make an impact. In the context of climate change, for example, the G20 account for over 75 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. The Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate brings many of those actors together (CCPI 2025).

Robyn Eckersley (2012: 24) agrees that inclusive multilateralism' is unlikely to produce a timely climate treaty, but warns that 'exclusive minilateralism' is 'elitist, procedurally unjust, self-serving, and likely to thwart the justice principles of the UNFCCC' (26). Instead, she advocates for 'inclusive minilateralism, based on 'common but differentiated representation', that is, representation by the most capable, the most responsible, and the most vulnerable' (26). Framed that way, however, the number of countries to which those criteria apply would make for a more multilateral than minilateral approach to a just energy transition.

It is worth recalling that amid all the diagnoses of the novel nature of contemporary disorder, plurality, hybridity, and fragmentation in global governance – including that which exists at the interface of energy and climate change, one subsection of the broader regime complex on climate change (Keohane & Victor 2011) – there are precedents both for such challenges and for governance innovations that have sought to address them. Indeed, there is a rich history of attempts to complement, strengthen, or otherwise bypass the slow pace of international climate negotiations to accelerate progress on financing and technology diffusion of lower-carbon energy alternatives through public private partnerships and forms of transnational governance from the Asia Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate to REEEP (Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership) and REN21 (Bulkeley et al. 2014). Even 15 years ago, Szulecki et al. (2011) found more than 46 dedicated transnational multi-stakeholder partnerships on sustainable energy working across different scales to enable knowledge dissemination and technology transfer, the building of institutional capacity and training, and technical implementation and innovation, with a few seeking to create new energy infrastructures on the ground.

Following in this vein at the UNFCCC COP26 in 2021, several national and subnational governments launched BOGA with the central aim of promoting a managed phaseout of fossil fuels to align with the Paris Agreement (BOGA, 2021). Moreover, 39 countries and financial institutions also pledged at COP26 to phase out public finance and investment for coal, oil, and gas by the of 2022, with other nations and institutions joining the initiative at COP27 in Egypt. Since its inception, the Clean Energy Transition Partnership has expanded to around 40 signatories, including major fossil fuel-financing countries such as Australia, the USA, and Canada. The example of the PPCA also shows how a few countries, in this case the United Kingdom and Canada, can rapidly 'internationalise' a new idea, in this case phasing out unabated coal-fired power. The Alliance grew from 27 members at its beginning in 2017 to 165 members by late 2021 and has come to attract members from important coal regions such as Germany and North Macedonia. That said, with certain notable exceptions (e.g. Germany),

'countries pledge to phase out coal only when potential stranded assets, employment losses, regional impacts and other costs are low' (Jewell et al. 2019: 596). Moreover, a phaseout is 'more likely to be pursued by independent and transparent governments in wealthy countries, which have the capacity to bear substantial political, social and economic costs' (596). PPCA also 'excludes coal mining from its scope, focusing solely on coal-fired power production, which enables countries willing to phase out the latter, but not the former, to join' (van Asselt et al. 2022: 35).

There have also been bilateral and trilateral approaches to phasing out fossil fuels at the international level in the form of JETPs that have been negotiated by a series of donor countries, such as the UK, US, and Japan, with mainly coal-dependent nations to date (Indonesia, South Africa, Senegal, and Vietnam). But civil society groups have expressed concerns about the financing model the partnerships promote (concessional finance and majority private rather than public finance), the lack of consultation with societal actors beyond business about how the funding will be allocated, conditionalities and who imposes them (since they are often tied to neoliberal policy reforms and requirements), and continued fossil fuel lock-in. Indonesia's JETP, for example, comes with a requirement to purchase carbon capture and storage technology from Japan, one of the key donors in the partnership. Moreover, though the partnerships were designed to support countries to reduce coal use and Indonesia has committed to stop developing new coal plants, plants built to power strategic industrial projects are exempted so long as the plants reduce their emissions 35 per cent in 10 years and shut down by 2050 (Farand 2023).

Taken together, these initiatives are best thought of as helping to tackle distinct aspects of the sprawling and complex challenge of accelerating just transitions in different ways across diverse sectors and regions – plugging gaps and creating momentum but clearly not proportionate to the scale of the challenge. So, what would a more effective or alternative multilateral response look like?

The multilateral governance of just transition

Given the fragmented bi- and minilateral structure of many of the initiatives described in the previous section and their voluntary and non-binding nature, we will now turn our attention to what sorts of multilateral mechanisms could support a just transition away from fossil fuels. This section of the paper explores proposals for new multilateral arrangements, such as a Coal Elimination Treaty or a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (Burke & Fishel 2020; Newell & Simms 2020).

Proposals for a coal convention have been made before by academics (Burke & Fishel 2020) and leaders such as former President Tong of Kiribati. In 2015, in the Suva Declaration on Climate Change issued from the Pacific Islands Development Forum Third Annual Summit held in Suva, Fiji, decision-makers called for: 'a new global dialogue on the implementation of an international moratorium on the development and expansion of fossil fuel extracting industries, particularly the construction of new coal mines, as an urgent step towards decarbonising the global economy' (Suva declaration 2015: 8). In 2016, 14 Pacific Island nations discussed a treaty that would ban new coal mining and embrace the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal set at the Paris climate talks (Brittlebank 2016).

Given the need to address not just coal but also gas and oil, a proposal then emerged for a Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty (Simms & Newell 2018). As a complementary approach to the climate regime – which for thirty years did not name fossil fuels as the number one source of the climate problem – this proposal seeks a fair exit from fossil fuels. Organised around three key pillars which mirror the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, it would seek to: prevent the expansion of new extraction of coal, oil, and gas (non-proliferation); support the early retirement of many existing fossil fuel infrastructures (fair phaseout); and finance non-fossil energy pathways in poorer countries and those reliant on fossil fuels (just transition) (Newell & Simms 2020; Newell et al. 2022). To date, the proposal has been endorsed by 18 governments (including Colombia, Cambodia, Pakistan, and small island and Pacific states), international organisations (such as the WHO and European Parliament), 10 Indigenous nations, 700 elected officials from 85 countries, 131 cities and subnational governments, 1 million individuals, 3,500 civil society institutions, and faith institutions representing more than 1.5 billion people (Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty 2025). Assuming the campaign can succeed in persuading 20 countries to endorse it, negotiations towards such a treaty could potentially commence in 2026 following the world's first summit on the elimination of fossil fuels to be hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands in April 2026.

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Though I have discussed them separately here, minilateral and multilateral pathways are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather can be sequenced and exist on a spectrum of more legal and institutional pathways to a managed exit from fossil fuels. van Asselt and Newell (2022) explore two idealised forms of international cooperation on the supply-side, aimed at regulating the supply of fossil fuels: a 'club' model based on non-legally binding principles and a multilateral environmental agreement (MEA) based on legally binding principles and institutional architecture. A supply-side club comprised of like-minded states provides a greater degree of flexibility than an MEA in terms of procedures, legal forms, and sequencing. A club model could also incorporate non-state and subnational actors, which has been central to the implementation of supply-side policies to date through clubs such as BOGA and the PPCA. An approach based on an MEA, on the other hand, would formally engage a larger number of participants and have a legally binding agreement as its basis that could explicitly address fossil fuel production. An MEA would create a high degree of institutionalisation, signal a strong commitment from parties, have a decision-making body or fora as well as a dedicated secretariat, and would usually require ratification and therefore the engagement of national parliaments and legislatures.

Both models have benefits and costs. The club approach is inherently dynamic, which means it can be set up and scaled at a speed commensurate to the urgent need to address fossil fuel production. MEAs can take longer to create and formalise, although there are exceptions such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which was concluded in under three years and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which was negotiated in two years. A club arrangement with non-binding commitments may be more effective at bringing fossil fuel majors into the fold. However, a club arrangement can suffer from issues of free-riding, leakages, weak levels of institutionalisation, and backsliding from members. At the moment, both mini-lateral climate 'phase-out' clubs (Koppenberg 2025) are expanding and momentum is gathering behind the proposal for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty with the former very much preparing the ground and compatible with the latter.

Future pathways to an orderly and just energy transition

So, what would be required for these proposals for minilateral and multilateral governance arrangements to extend their ambition and inclusion in terms of reach, membership, sectoral, and geographic coverage in order to provide a more effective basis for an orderly energy transition away from fossil fuels? Given the multilevel governance dynamics at play here, it is important to explore scenarios in national, regional, and global settings involving key actors. My reflections on this build on three experiences in particular. Firstly, I served as research lead on a global policy dialogue on the theme of 'Prosperity post fossil fuels' conducted over several days with government representatives from oil- and gas-dependent economies (Azerbaijan, Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, and Trinidad and Tobago); a range of multilateral actors from IRENA, the EU, and the World Bank; and representatives from the US and Australian governments. Secondly, I co-organised a regionally focused workshop with activists and researchers from key 'first mover' countries in Latin America that, in different ways, have put policies in place to leave reserves of fossil fuels in the ground (Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Ecuador). Thirdly, I co-organised an event convened in the UK with former government advisors and civil society organisations on ways to strengthen UK leadership on climate and energy, particularly in relation to the initiatives it is leading to mobilise finance for renewable energy and phase out support for fossil fuels.

A key issue that emerged in the policy dialogue with major oil and gas producers was economic diversification and which internal policy tools and forms of economic support might be required to support an economy-wide transition away from fossil fuels, not just in the energy sector (Peszko et al. 2020). This is crucial where fossil fuel revenues are central to the tax base of an economy or to supporting welfare provision, such as in Norway and Nigeria. This suggests that entry points for more co-ordinated international support to just transitions need to bring in key international economic institutions such as the World Bank, WTO, and UNCTAD to a far greater degree. The workshop in Latin America, meanwhile, underscored the need for regional cooperation and engagement to help build alternative regional energy pathways based on renewables, regional grids, and power pools as well as measures to address the fiscal and debt crises faced by many countries in the region, without which it be impossible to persuade policy elites and voters to forego exploiting their fossil fuel reserves. Co-ordinated civil society campaigns will also be vital to strengthen and maintain support for the 'first movers' that have agreed to not issue licenses for oil and gas and to accelerate the exit from coal in the face of significant countervailing pressure domestically (CFAL 2025).

The context for the third scenario exercise was the new Labour government in the UK seeking to position itself as a global leader of efforts to boost a transition to clean power, having undergone its own transition away from coal and led initiatives to accelerate the phaseout of finance for fossil fuels (SUS POL 2025). Home of the first industrial revolution and one of the world's major financial hubs for oil majors such as BP and Shell and a new GB Energy company, the UK might be well placed to take up this mantle. But this is a crowded space with many initiatives already in existence, as we have seen in the previous sections. In November 2024, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer launched the Global Clean Power Alliance (GOPA) at the G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro. Touted as a way to position the UK 'at the very heart of the single most significant technological challenge and opportunity of this century' (Lammy 2023), the GOPA's main foci are to accelerate the mobilisation of private finance and create country partnerships to build capacity and overcome barriers to deploying that finance. The alliance

is currently comprised of the UK, Brazil, Australia, Barbados, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Germany, Morocco, Norway, Tanzania, and the African Union, with the European Union and US (for the time being) also partnering with the UK.

It has several key missions, the first and most developed of which is on finance. Though it is yet to be decided, a second mission of the GCPA could be energy security and supply chains. Here the alliance could operate as a 'reverse OPEC' to a 'buyers' club' for critical minerals. How much power and influence the GCPA could wield in such a role would depend on how many other key economies could be persuaded to join the alliance. To do so, those economies will want to know the value added of this new initiative. We know from previous experience that successful initiatives are those which respond to a clear demand, do something different, operate an effective partnership model, and set clear deadlines and milestones around which finance is mobilised (E3G and Chatham House 2024). The true test of leadership, however, is whether the fine words expressed in international fora are matched by deeds at home. Having undergone a public consultation, the UK government has reaffirmed its commitment to end new oil and gas licenses in the North Sea despite ongoing uncertainty around the approval of the Rosebank oilfield in the North Sea (UK Government 2025).

Though the focus of this paper has been on supply (fairly cutting the production of fossil fuels), it is inevitably also the case that efforts to drastically reduce demand are vital to global efforts to address the climate crisis. Global levels of demand for critical minerals for electrification – even with new innovations to prolong the life of batteries and reduce the resource intensity of their production – are likely to reach unsustainable levels, putting pressure on communities the world over. We need to cut supply and demand with 'both arms of the scissors' (Green & Denniss 2018). Renewable energy adds to the energy mix but does not enable a shift away from fossil fuels so long as levels of demand continue to increase, ensuring that a transition does not take place (Fresso 2024).

Given the interrelated nature of energy transitions, a globally just transition cannot be one in which richer countries source the materials they need for their national transitions by externalising and imposing social and environmental costs on poorer countries and communities. This is also where the prospects of a globally just transition intersect with the global politics of trade, finance, and investment. For example, launched in 2019 at the initiative of New Zealand, the Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability aims to use trade rules to phase out fossil fuel subsidies among its parties. It complements an earlier initiative launched by New Zealand to establish an informal 'Friends' group of non-G20 countries to encourage G20 and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) leaders to act on their commitments to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies as soon as possible. To address concerns that treaties with investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms can be used to frustrate and challenge transitions away from fossil fuels, recent studies have pointed to the potential for climate clubs to develop responses such as providing a waiver agreement for ISDS related to fossil fuel assets, a more general ISDS waiver agreement, or even a mutual agreement to terminate investment treaties (Tienhaara et al. 2025). Hence, enabling a globally just transition will not only derive from bespoke arenas and club arrangements targeting climate and energy questions, but also from efforts to reform trade and investment agreements.

There is a task here to sequence and seek openings and intervention points to nurture more ambitious and socially just global energy transition strategies. Seeking to simultaneously address all the dimensions and sources of injustice in the international system will inevitably result in deadlock, loss of political momentum, and failure. But concerted action from a few

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states could build significant momentum. Just five wealthy producer states from the Global North are responsible for 51 per cent of the planned expansion of oil and gas production by 2050, underscoring the importance of historical responsibility and capacity to transition in discussions of supply-side policies (OCI, 2023). Those states that bear the most historical responsibility for climate change, have the greatest resources, and hold the most capacity to diversify their economies away from fossil fuels must lead global efforts and support others to do the same. Such countries must show national, regional, and global leadership even while major economies such as the US refuse to engage. Countries from the Global South whose own contributions to climate change are increasing – such as China, India, South Africa, and Indonesia – will expect these countries from the Global North to lead as a condition to enhancing their own ambitions.

At the same time, this means being willing to broaden the discussion of ‘just transitions’ beyond questions of (private) finance, (Northern) technology, and retraining of (unionised) workers to address bigger questions of economic justice such as debt, taxation, and unfair terms of trade. Commitment to work on these broader issues over the medium term could be a quid pro quo for short-term cooperation and collaboration to decarbonise the global energy system. Scenarios and models are often imagined to be technical exercises focused on technological uptake and the costs of technologies and their deployment. But whether different pathways are possible depends on building support, trust, and coalitions; partnering with different actors; forming international alliances; and thinking creatively and innovatively about how to overcome obstacles. Though they do not have to be sequential, I have argued here that multilateralism supporting the transition away from fossil fuels may provide the means to do this. If it can ride trends towards the falling price of renewables and the increasing geopolitical and economic costs of dependence on fossil fuels, this may lay the foundation for the multilateral response ultimately needed to ensure the transition is both fair and effective. The fact that 83 countries supported the call for a roadmap to move away from fossil fuels and that the world’s first ever summit on a just transition away from fossil fuels will be hosted in April 2026 by Colombia and the Netherlands provides a hopeful indication that momentum is building to address this critical issue even as petro-states continue to veto progress within the climate negotiations.

Acronyms

BOGA – Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance

COP – Conference of the Parties

JETP – Just Energy Transition Partnerships

GOPA – Global Clean Power Alliance

IEA – International Energy Agency

IRENA – International Renewable Energy Agency

ISDS – investor-state dispute settlement

MEA – multilateral environmental agreement

PPCA – Powering Past Coal Alliance

REEEP – Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership

STEPS – Stated Policies Scenario

UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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