

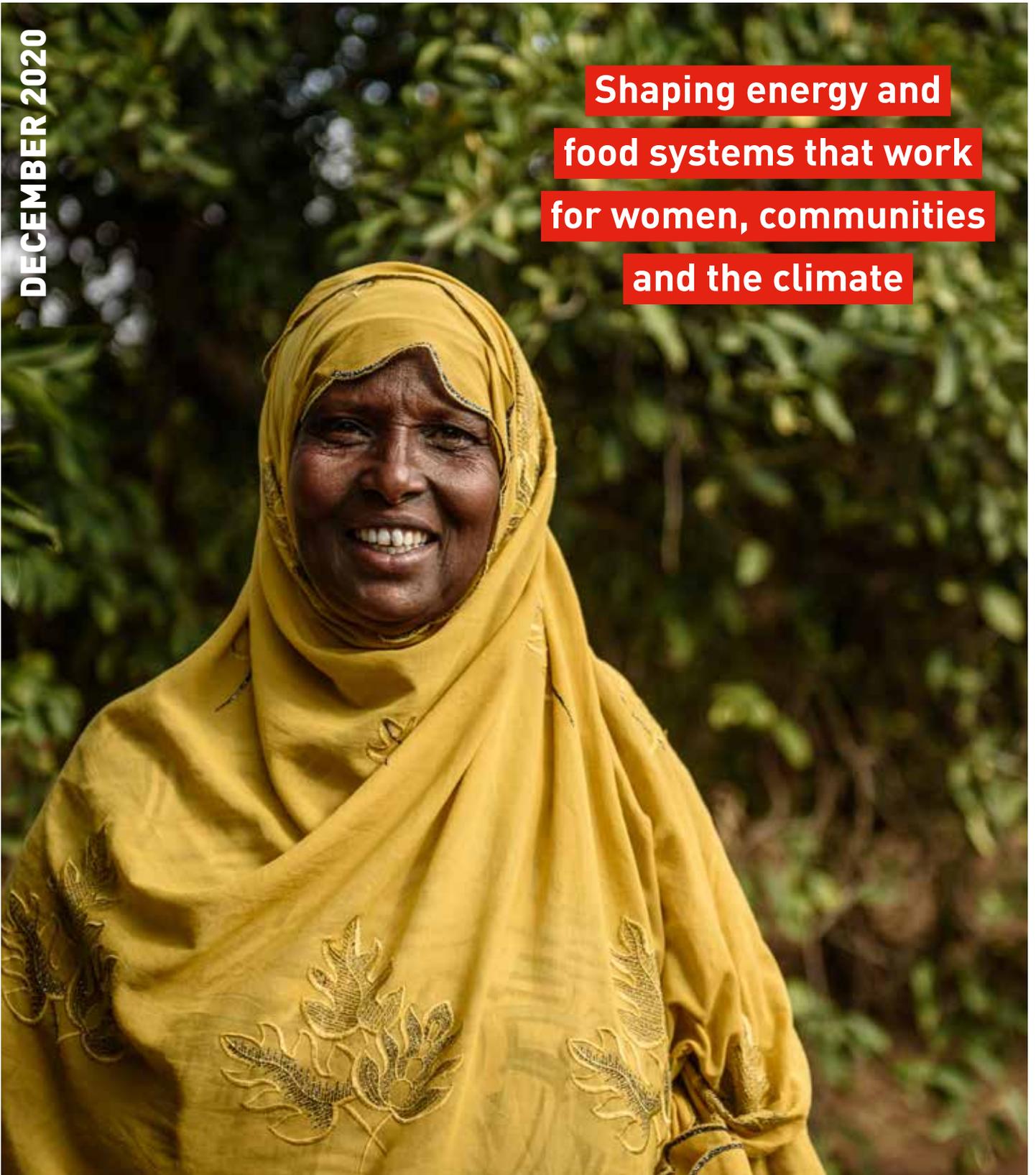
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# **PRINCIPLES FOR JUST TRANSITIONS**

**IN EXTRACTIVES AND AGRICULTURE**

**DECEMBER 2020**

**Shaping energy and  
food systems that work  
for women, communities  
and the climate**



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2020



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*ActionAid is a leading international human rights organisation working in over 45 countries with communities and local organisations, supporting them to claim their rights and build a life without poverty and injustice. With our grassroots experience, we demand progress from those in power at local, national and international levels to build lasting change.*

ActionAid Principles for Just Transitions in Extractives and Agriculture  
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Her farm used to get flooded. ActionAid built a gabion (wall made of rocks covered in wire) that provided a barrier and stopped flood waters from inundating Naema’s farm.  
© Jennifer Huxta/Actionaid

**Acronyms**

- CO2** – Carbon dioxide
- DRC** – Democratic Republic of the Congo
- EV** – Electric vehicle
- FPIC** – Free, prior and informed consent
- GHGs** – Greenhouse Gases
- IPCC** – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- ITUC** – International Trade Unions Confederation
- NAP** – National Adaptation Plan
- NDC** – Nationally Determined Contribution (i.e. national climate policy)
- OECD** – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PV** – Photovoltaics (solar electricity technology)
- SDGs** – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- SOFI** – State of Food and Nutrition in the World (an annual report published by the United Nations)
- UNGP** – United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights



Bakoto Kinteh, Binta Fadera and Fatou Darboe from The Gambia walk down the Juffureh dyke. © Jane Hahn/ActionAid

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Pheong Saret from Cambodia where mangroves are being lost at an alarming rate. © Natasha Mulder/ActionAid

**As a result of a century of industrialisation, the global climate crisis is already triggering climate impacts that affect women and marginalised communities in the global South the hardest. This crisis is likely to get far more severe unless transformative climate action is taken.**

Efforts to address the climate emergency and limit global warming require fundamental and rapid change in our energy and food systems. Taken together, the energy and food sectors are the basis of livelihood and wellbeing for much of the planet. This means that it is critical that the transition to greener, more resilient systems is done with great care, to ensure - and not undermine - social justice.

It is important to recognise the extent to which the energy and extractive sectors are complex and interconnected. As with agriculture and food systems, climate transitions in these sectors can affect diverse stakeholders who may not always be visible at first glance, with an ever-present risk that shifts can cause unintended harm. Drawing on input from trades unions, communities, civil society and other key stakeholders, ActionAid has developed a set of Principles for Just Transitions in Extractives and Agriculture, to help shape fair climate futures in our energy and food systems.

**The term “Just Transition” does not only describe WHAT the new system will look like, but also HOW that transformation should be carried out.**

Just transitions must:

- Address – and not exacerbate – inequalities
- Transform systems to work for people, nature and the climate
- Ensure inclusiveness and participation
- Develop comprehensive plans and policy frameworks.

The climate emergency requires a transformation in our energy systems, from fossil fuels to renewables. Currently, both fossil fuels and renewables are heavily dependent on the extractive industries. Major efforts are therefore needed to protect the rights of people at risk of losing out from climate transitions. The needs of workers and women in coal mining communities – who may lose their livelihoods – as well as those who may be affected by the expansion of metals and mineral extraction for

the production of renewable energy, must be carefully considered. Both these sectors are dogged by human rights violations, deep inequalities and environmental harm. Because mining is often associated with land grabbing, pollution and gender-based violence, women tend to suffer the worst impacts of mining, and their perspectives ignored by policy makers. A truly just energy transition must therefore avoid shifting human rights abuses and exploitation to new areas, from one type of extractive mining to another.

Workers, women and communities whose livelihoods are connected to the fossil fuel sector must be given opportunities for a better future. They must be provided with the space to organise, opportunities to participate in decision-making, positive alternatives for their livelihoods, community and well-being, and meaningful support, social protection and training to make the transition away from fossil fuel extraction.

At the same time, for communities likely to be affected by the expansion of mineral and metal extraction for renewables, development and enforcement of strong mandatory regulations for “responsible mining” is urgently needed, to ensure stringent labour, environmental and social standards.

As a priority, renewable technologies must reduce their reliance on mining for new metals and minerals, by using less material in their products. Systems to recycle metals and minerals must be dramatically scaled up, presenting potential opportunities for increased employment. However improved systems for mineral and metal recycling must also be very carefully governed by strong labour and environmental standards to protect workers’ health and the environment. A just transition in energy and extractives should also use renewables to improve energy access and end energy poverty.

Just transition principles must also govern climate action in agriculture and food systems. To address agriculture’s impact on the climate (and the climate’s impacts on agriculture), food systems must transition from industrial agriculture to agroecology, produce and consume less and better meat, ensure protection and restoration of ecosystems, and avoid false solutions such as large-scale production of biofuels.

However these changes must not leave farmers and communities stranded without options. Transitions must take account of the implications of these changes for farmers, their role, and the support required. There is already deep inequality in the food system, including exploitation and low incomes, extra barriers and burdens for women farmers, corporate concentration of land and wealth, rising hunger, and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. These must be addressed through just transition processes.

Communities, particularly women and marginalised community members, should be given the opportunity to map and discuss their concerns and aspirations in participatory planning processes. These processes can help reveal key challenges and opportunities, and to develop comprehensive plans that include the necessary social protections, trainings, support mechanisms and incentives to help the shift to climate-friendly gender-just food systems that work for people, nature and the planet.

When creating the shift towards a climate-safe future, just transitions must be shaped through inclusive processes and comprehensive planning and policy frameworks that address the needs of workers, farmers, women and communities. In this way, they can help communities concerned that climate policies may lead to loss of jobs and livelihoods, to shape positive futures, and to become advocates for climate action.



# 1. CLIMATE EMERGENCY: THE NEED FOR ACTION

Nalishebo from Zambia, where extreme drought has led to food shortages for her and her community.  
© Fredrick Ntoka/ActionAid

Planet Earth is at risk of runaway climate breakdown. As a result of a century of industrialisation the planet has already increased its average global temperature by about 1°C, and this is triggering increasingly frequent and intense droughts, heat waves, wildfires, cyclones, floods, rising sea levels, desertification, loss of fresh water sources and crop failures. If pollution and warming continue at current trends, key climate system thresholds or “tipping points” could be crossed, triggering reinforcing feedback loops that are difficult to stop. Runaway climate change and catastrophically escalating global temperatures could result.

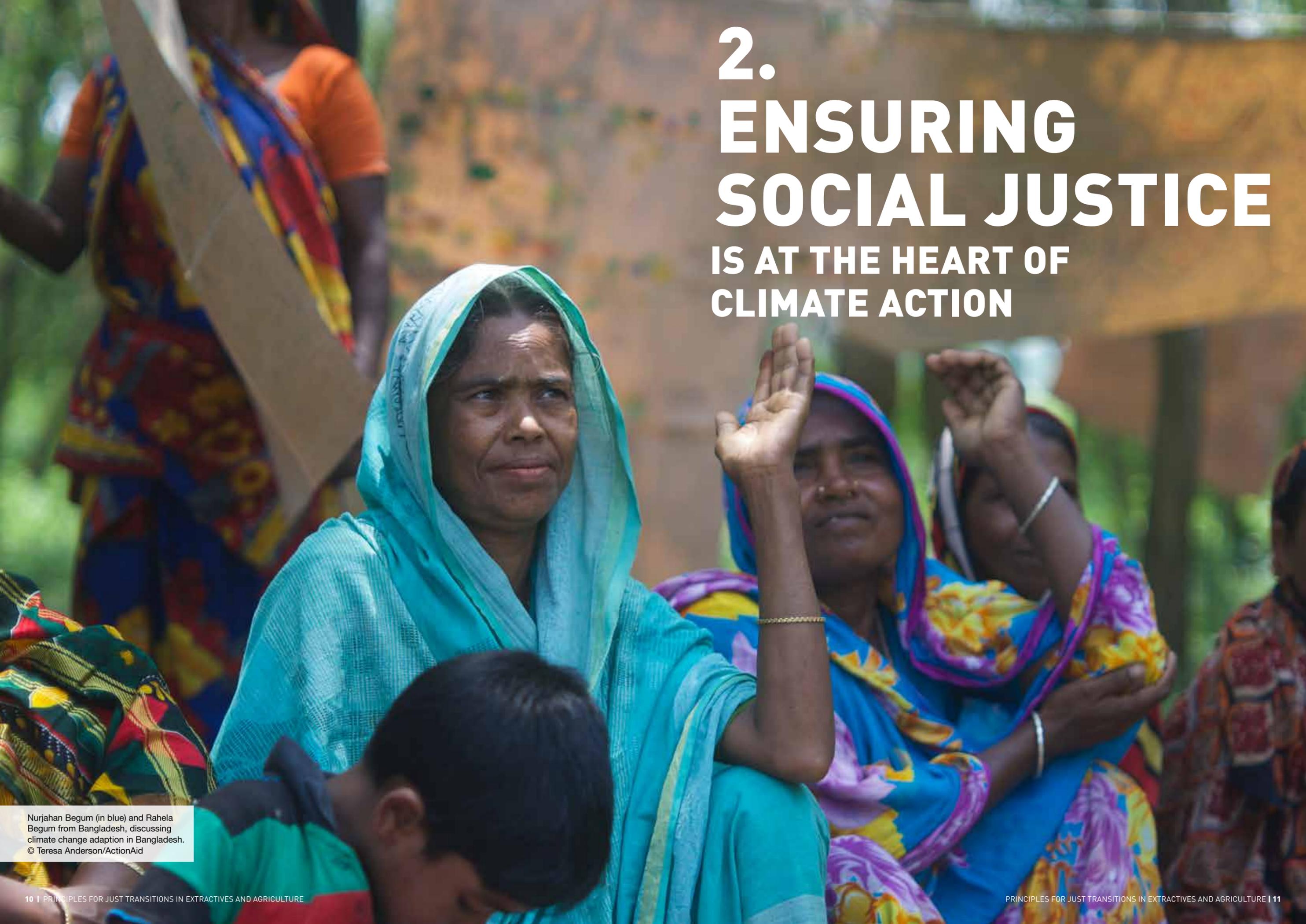
A major restructuring of the world’s polluting industries is therefore urgently required. Energy and food systems are the major source of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) that are currently warming the planet. These sectors must urgently transition to climate-friendly approaches in order to give the planet a chance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, as mandated in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and to better strengthen communities’ resilience to climate impacts.

Higher income countries with the most historical responsibility for causing climate change must take the lead in action, and in addition provide financial support to enable lower-income countries to join this effort and to deal with the impacts of the climate crisis.

**“Women, young people, rural and marginalised communities, particularly in the global South, are on the front line of this climate emergency, suffering the impacts first and worst.”**



A palm oil plantation in Guatemala.  
© Fabio Erdos/ActionAid



# 2. ENSURING SOCIAL JUSTICE IS AT THE HEART OF CLIMATE ACTION

Nurjahan Begum (in blue) and Rahela Begum from Bangladesh, discussing climate change adaption in Bangladesh.  
© Teresa Anderson/ActionAid

Many of the world's workers, communities and countries are dependent on extractives and agriculture for their livelihoods, wellbeing and economies. Climate transitions in these sectors could bring benefits to billions of people – but they could also have huge negative socio-economic ramifications if done without prudence. Interventions must therefore be undertaken carefully, to avoid exacerbating or driving inequalities such as gender inequality, poverty, hunger and landlessness. Climate action must therefore ensure that social justice is at the heart of transition in energy and food systems. Just transitions mean getting it right, from the beginning.

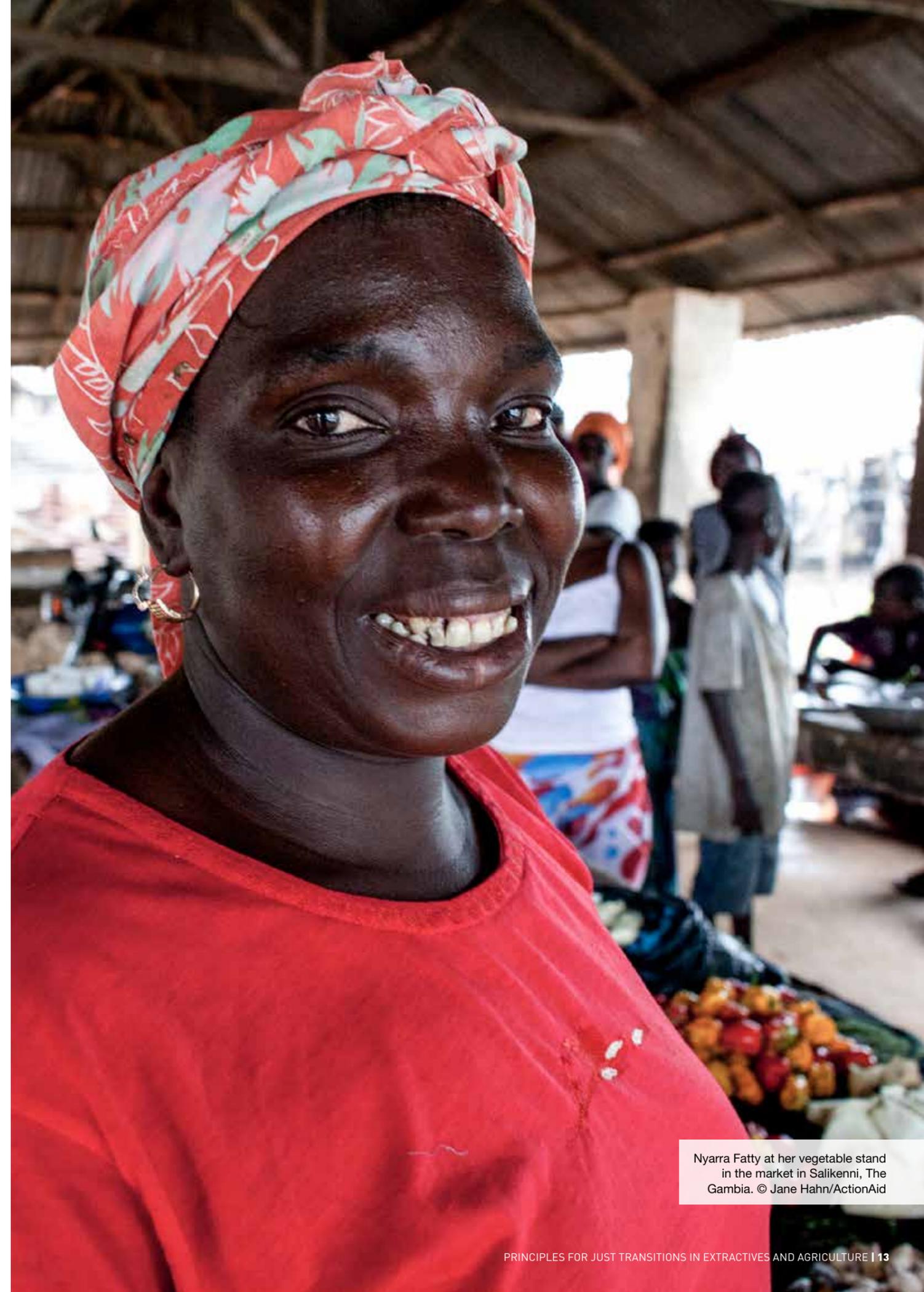
The term “Just Transition” was originally coined by the Union movement, and has been particularly developed by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) over the last decade, much of it in relation to the challenges facing coal-mining communities in the global North as governments look to shift to less polluting sources of energy. Unions highlight that in addition to solving the climate crisis, a just transition away from coal must enable social dialogue that lets workers shape the outcomes to bring positive opportunities through decent jobs, improved labour rights, strengthened social protections and increased organised labour, all of which should benefit their wider communities.

The term “just transition” is therefore an important concept that can derive key lessons from the transition away from coal, and apply these to other sectors across energy, extractives and agriculture.

For many workers, unions will play a key role in influencing just transitions through collective organising to present analyses and concerns, and to negotiate for workers' rights. However in agriculture as well as in mining (particularly in the global South), farmers and workers are often not formally employed or organised in formal unions. Climate transitions do not only affect workers and farmers, but also their wider communities. Women, young people and marginalised community members will not usually have formal unions to represent them in negotiations, but they are important stakeholders whose views must play a key role in shaping transitions. Civil society therefore has a critical role to play in supporting these communities to participate in collective analysis and advocating for their rights.

Just transitions can help to energise climate strategies, by involving communities who might otherwise resist the transition for fear of being left behind, so that they can contribute to shaping plans, policy and support frameworks for the transition, and to thus become advocates for positive change.

**“Many of the world's workers, communities and countries are dependent on extractives and agriculture for their livelihoods, wellbeing and economies.”**



Nyarra Fatty at her vegetable stand in the market in Salikenni, The Gambia. © Jane Hahn/ActionAid

# 3. FOUR KEY PRINCIPLES FOR JUST TRANSITIONS IN EXTRACTIVES AND AGRICULTURE

**Nothing about us  
without us**

Nothing about us without us



South African activist Khosi Nomnqa, member of the Women from Mining-Affected Communities United in Action (WAMUA) group.  
© Miora Rajaonary

Just transition initiatives must consider the different contexts and complexities of each sector and specific situation. The socio-economic and environmental impacts of various types of mining and agriculture; the different power structures, dynamics and markets; whether or not workers are formally employed and/or unionised: all of these must be taken into account when applying just transition thinking to different contexts across energy, extractive and agriculture systems.

In general, ActionAid finds that we can apply **4 common principles to apply when undertaking Just Transitions**. These principles do not need to be carried out in a linear sequence, but can guide thinking throughout the process.

### **ADDRESS – AND DON'T EXACERBATE - INEQUALITIES**

In order to convince key communities to make the changes needed, climate transitions need to understand and address the ways in which current systems are causing workers and vulnerable communities to be exploited, squeezed or displaced. Farmers and workers, whose livelihoods are often already precarious, may understandably be worried that they will be further penalised by new climate policies and obligations. Transitions must address pre-existing inequalities including lack of access to food, energy or decent work, gender-based inequalities, historical responsibility for causing the climate crisis, and vulnerability to its impacts. It must avoid false solutions and technologies that harm communities, or that concentrate control, wealth, land and power in fewer hands – for example large-scale bioenergy plantations that are likely to drive land grabs and displace marginalised communities. Climate transitions must not simply push exploitation and destruction into new areas for different resources. Otherwise they will likely only work for powerful stakeholders, and harm the very people whose role will be central to a climate-safe future. As new areas of employment grow (including in agriculture, mining and recycling of materials) these must be governed by strong labour and environmental standards to protect worker health, women's rights, community wellbeing and the environment.

### **TRANSFORM ENERGY AND FOOD SYSTEMS TO WORK FOR PEOPLE, NATURE AND THE CLIMATE**

A fundamental reshaping of our energy, extractive, food and agriculture systems is needed at large-scale and rapid speed. Leaving it entirely to "green consumerism" led by individual progressive farmers, energy producers and consumers, will not be enough to drive change quickly enough, or compensate for continued pollution and destruction. Thus systemic policy changes, bold initiatives, effective regulations and support mechanisms are needed to bring about transformation to genuinely sustainable approaches at the speed and scale required. These changes must: take into account the needs of the climate (reducing the total GHG footprint across the full life-cycle of production, distribution and use, strengthening resilience to climate impacts); ensure social justice (for example by securing people's rights and the rights of women, strengthening protections for workers, valuing unpaid care work, improving access to food, energy, livelihoods and wellbeing); and ensure that the planet's biodiversity and natural ecosystems are protected and enhanced.

### **ENSURE INCLUSIVENESS AND PARTICIPATION**

A just transition does not only describe WHAT food and energy systems will transition to, but also HOW that transition is carried out. How a process is carried out is key to success in a just transition. To be successful, climate transitions must address power inequalities in food and energy systems, and give marginalised communities – particularly women - a seat at the table. An essential first step is to map the different stakeholders (across the life-cycle of production, distribution and consumption) who are likely to be affected by changes, and their relative power. Farmers and miners are not homogenous, and depending on their location, gender, economic status, ethnicity or caste, methods of production, will wield different degrees of influence and have different perspectives.

Participation does not only mean holding a quick consultation on a ready-made plan or policy. It means taking account of perspectives, knowledge and concerns right from the start, addressing power imbalances and access to power, and building comprehensive plans centred on the needs and rights of people. Just transition processes must recognise that different stakeholders have different skillsets, ways of communicating their views, and levels of literacy. Not everyone with a valuable perspective will be ready with a PowerPoint presentation and lobby document! Women and marginalised community members will often face cultural barriers to speaking up, even though they have very specific and valuable insights into the realities they face around climate change, agriculture and community dynamics. By enabling the communities involved in and affected by energy and food transitions to have meaningful opportunities to engage and shape their own future in a way that benefits them, inclusive planning processes can avoid the risk of top-down change that reinforces inequality. In this way, workers, farmers and communities can transform from resisting change, to becoming powerful advocates for climate action.

### **DEVELOP COMPREHENSIVE PLANS AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS**

Governments must act as midwives for just transitions in energy and food, to facilitate effective transformations on the scale required. Once solutions, strategies and plans have been developed in collaboration with stakeholders, comprehensive policy frameworks can provide positive opportunities for better energy and food systems that work for workers, farmers, women, communities and the climate. Regional and national level impact assessments and planning processes, gender-responsive and inclusive policies, social protection, training and reskilling, support for new sectors and new routes to market, as well as joined-up thinking that links different sectors and global connections will be key. These elements can form the basis of increasingly ambitious national climate policies including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).



# 4. A JUST TRANSITION IN ENERGY AND EXTRACTIVES LOOKING AT THE WHOLE SYSTEM

Women who have been greatly affected by coal mining in South Africa.  
© Opmeer/ActionAid

To avoid runaway climate change, the world must rapidly transition its energy systems away from dependence on coal and other fossil fuels, towards renewable energy sources such as solar and wind. But with the fossil fuel industry claiming to offer multiple benefits such as jobs for workers, energy security and foreign export earnings, many governments – even those in the global South that are on the frontline of climate impacts - still plan to pursue fossil fuel development. The shift away from fossil fuels therefore requires governments and communities to be convinced that the alternatives will provide better options for livelihoods, energy and economies.

Currently, both fossil and renewable-based energy rely on the extractive industries. In a just transition in energy, workers’ and communities’ perspectives must be heard, and their rights and ecosystems protected. Materials must be sourced responsibly, and access to energy must become more equitable.

**“In a just transition in energy, workers’ and communities’ perspectives must be heard, and their rights and ecosystems protected.”**

### The true cost of renewables

According to a World Bank report<sup>1</sup>, efforts to limit warming to at least 2°C, as outlined in the Paris Agreement, could cause demand for the minerals required for the construction of solar panels (namely iron, copper, lead, molybdenum, nickel and zinc) to increase by up to 300% by 2050. Likewise, it is predicted that the demand for the minerals and metals needed for the construction of wind turbines and energy storage batteries (namely cobalt, lithium and rare earths) will rise by up to 450%<sup>2</sup>.

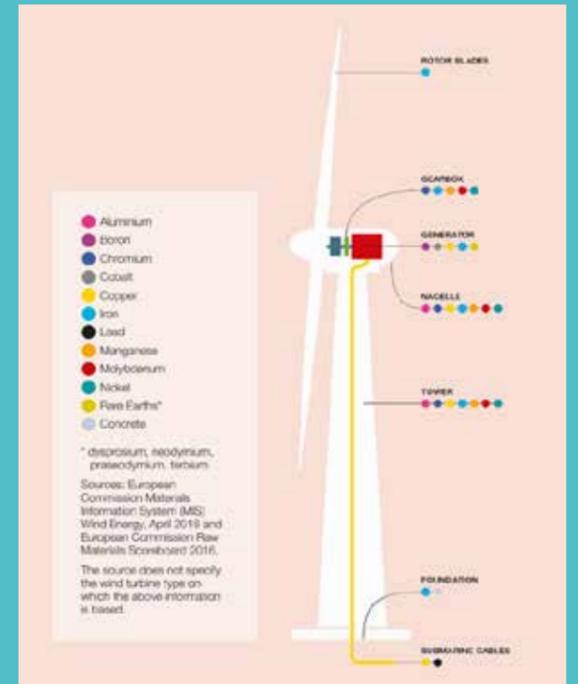
Most of the production of these critical metals and minerals is concentrated in developing countries. Action is urgently needed to prevent the adverse effects of mining activities on human rights and environmental degradation. It is critical to ensure that the extraction of metals and minerals is managed in a way that does not undermine the sustainable development priorities of the countries concerned. The emergence of violence and conflicts and the violations of other human rights should also not be an outcome of prioritizing economic profits over human lives. Mineral producing countries should therefore take measures to ensure responsible supply chains for metals and minerals, and should use their leverage to deliver this.

<sup>1</sup> Arrobas, Daniele La Porta; Hund, Kirsten Lori; McCormick, Michael Stephen; Ningthoujam, Jagabanta; Drexhage, John Richard. 2017. The Growing Role of Minerals and Metals for a Low Carbon Future (English). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/207371500386458722/The-Growing-Role-of-Minerals-and-Metals-for-a-Low-Carbon-Future>

<sup>2</sup> Kirsten Hund, Daniele La Porta, Thao P. Fabregas, Tim Laing, John Drexhage . 2020. Minerals for Climate Action: The Mineral Intensity of the Clean Energy Transition (English). Washington D.C. World Bank; Climate Smart Mining Facility: <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/961711588875536384/Minerals-for-Climate-Action-The-Mineral-Intensity-of-the-Clean-Energy-Transition.pdf>

### Human Rights in Wind Turbines Supply Chains 2018/2019

Two pieces of research by ActionAid Netherlands found human rights risks associated with the minerals and metals needed to build offshore wind turbines. Metals like copper and cobalt are essential and indispensable elements when building offshore wind turbines. The sourcing of these metals however, has been linked to human rights abuses in countries like Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Women in Zambia are most negatively affected by copper extraction, while cobalt has been linked to child labour in the DRC. As the demand in wind turbines and other renewable energy sources is set to grow in the Netherlands, this is a critical moment to act on establishing responsible supply chains for minerals and metals.



### Understanding the needs of coal miners and their communities

For workers reliant on the fossil fuel industry for employment, the shift towards renewable energy can present huge concerns that they and their communities could be left behind, stranded with few livelihood opportunities.

It is also true that coal mining is difficult work, often poorly paid, and in unforgiving working conditions with limited labour protections and workers’ rights. Coal mining is often associated with a range of negative health impacts for workers. In addition to contributing to climate change, coal production is frequently associated with devastating local environmental and social impacts including pollution of air, water and soil. Particularly in global South countries, mining can displace local communities from their land, and deprives them of vital sources of fresh water. These impacts tend to harm local food production, and disproportionately affect women in local communities who tend to be responsible for growing food and fetching water, and who may not have secure tenure to the lands that they live and farm on. Mining is also associated with high rates of social breakdown and gender-based violence in the wider community. Furthermore, even though coal is a source of energy for generating electricity, many communities in the vicinity of coal production do not benefit from access to electricity. All-in-all, the coal mining usually brings far fewer benefits, and many more problems, than communities are originally promised.

Thus a just transition from fossil fuels to renewables must deliver positive solutions for workers and local communities, which address the inequalities and challenges they face. A just transition process must support workers and community members – including women - to identify their needs and challenges. It must create opportunities for economic diversification with decent jobs, improved labour rights, strengthened social protections and increased organised labour – all of which should benefit their wider communities. Unless workers in the coalmining sector feel confident that they have a positive future, they are likely to resist change, and could block the action necessary to avoid runaway climate breakdown.

### Addressing exploitation in the metal and mineral extractive industries

The shift in the energy sector away from fossil fuels has important implications for communities involved in or affected by the extraction and use of metals and minerals used in renewable energy. Those in affected mining communities may be based far away, often in different countries, from where key decisions about energy use are made. Cobalt, lithium, copper, gold, nickel, cadmium, manganese, rare earth metals and many others are used in the production of photovoltaic (PV) cells, wind turbines and batteries. The scaling up of mineral extraction is often enthusiastically presented by governments and advocates in mineral-rich countries as providing new jobs and opportunities for local and national economic development. However, the mining

of these resources tends to be dogged by deep socioeconomic and environmental injustices (similar to those experienced by coal mining communities) and which are particularly felt by local communities.

Metal and mineral extraction is often associated with a huge range of harms, including: land grabs (which particularly affect women farmers who often lack secure access to land); human rights abuses; low wages; poor and dangerous working conditions; harm to worker health; lack of social protections for sick, injured or aging workers; heavy use of water that creates water shortages for local communities; pollution of air, water and soils; heavy metals leaching into water systems as a result of acid mine drainage; mercury poisoning of water systems; destruction of ecosystems; gender-based violence; and the fuelling of violent conflict.

Colonial legacies, corruption and neo-colonial exploitation by multinational corporations mean that a few powerful individuals can get unimaginably wealthy from these industries, while workers, their families and local communities bear the impacts of local destruction, and receive few of the economic benefits. Thus the increased extraction of metals and minerals increases the risk of exploitation of communities and harm to the environment.

If the transition ends up destroying the ecosystems so vital for balancing the earth's climate, and further harming vulnerable communities already on the front line of climate impacts, it will likely be counter-productive for climate goals as well as other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables must therefore avoid simply displacing injustice and exploitation to other areas, and must not exploit or harm workers and communities involved in or affected by the use and extraction of metals and minerals.

Scaling up renewable energy systems is almost certain to require more mining for metals and minerals. However voluntary guidelines governing the sector such as the OECD guidelines<sup>3</sup> and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPR)<sup>4</sup> are rarely implemented. Even where laws do exist at national level, there tends to be limited implementation in practice. There is therefore an urgent need for strong mandatory international and national regulations and their effective implementation, to address the rampant exploitation that is associated with much metal and mineral mining. This must be done to benefit workers and communities, and to ensure strong social and environmental protections and equitable distribution of benefits. Countries in the

global South where many of the metal and mineral resources are located also have the potential to hold powerful positions in this process. They should use this leverage to protect their environment and the rights of communities.

**Stringent mandatory social and environmental requirements for responsible sourcing of minerals should therefore include and ensure:**

- Gender responsive human rights due diligence by companies, based on the UNGP and OECD guidelines;
- Communities' full prior and informed consent (FPIC) before developing or expanding areas for extraction;
- Informed community participation, including women, in decision-making beforehand;
- No land grabs;
- Equitable and adequate compensation for communities, including for women who may be affected by extraction on and around the lands that they have used and lived on;
- On-going processes for communities to have their voices heard and to engage meaningfully in decision-making as activities take place, and the right to reject mining developments should communities wish;
- Workers' rights including fair wages, safe and decent working conditions and social protections;
- Stringent environmental regulations;
- Requirement for and implementation of environmental impact assessments before extraction begins;
- Baseline measuring and on-going monitoring of environmental health of local water, soil, air and ecosystems;
- Accountability;
- And full and fair payment of taxes, with no tax avoidance or "sweetheart" deals.

**“The energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables must avoid simply displacing injustice and exploitation to other areas.”**



Industrial monoculture farming in Mato Grosso, Brazil. This model of agriculture pushes small farmers off their land and destroys ecosystems. © Fabio Erdos/ ActionAid

**Improving efficiency and recycling of materials in renewables**

Even as it is necessary to improve the social and environmental responsibility of mining for metals and minerals, the renewable energy industry has a responsibility to shift away from dependence on mining for new resources. The energy transition must therefore look to improve its efficiency use and massively scale up the recycling of materials.

As adoption of renewable energy has become more widespread in recent years, the industry has made significant progress in improving the efficiency of materials, i.e. reducing the amount of minerals and metals needed in products, particularly for solar PV.<sup>5</sup> Further improvement in material efficiency is still needed, however, as well as efforts to shift away from minerals associated with particularly dire social consequences such as cobalt, to help reduce the pressure for extraction.

The bulk of materials used in renewable energy and

storage, however, are going to waste at their end-of-life. There is huge potential and need to improve and scale up systems to recycle metals and materials, including through designing products to be more easily recycled, so as to reduce the pressure for extraction. End-of-life batteries are thought to have the greatest potential for recycling metals, including cobalt, lithium, nickel and manganese. While electric vehicle (EV) manufacturers have made progress in this area over recent years, there is still a lot of room for improvement, particularly as demand for these metals is particularly high for EVs.<sup>6</sup>

Improving and scaling up recycling systems for metals and minerals could potentially create significant new job opportunities, and this could even be linked with just transitions for workers moving out of the fossil fuel sector – although this has yet to happen, and is not yet part of discussions in the global South. There is huge potential to scale up the sector to meet much – if not all – of the needs of the renewable energy sector. However the emerging industry must avoid causing harm to workers' health and the environment. As the

<sup>3</sup> OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises (2011) [www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/48004323.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/mne/48004323.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011) [www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinessshr_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://earthworks.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/04/MCEC\\_UTS\\_ES\\_lowres.pdf](https://earthworks.org/cms/assets/uploads/2019/04/MCEC_UTS_ES_lowres.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

just transition in energy works to build out this sector, it must also be rigorously governed by strong labour and environmental standards.

### Improving access to energy

Energy transitions can and must address inequalities in energy access. Fossil fuels have failed to deliver access to electricity for many communities across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Poor urban and rural communities may not be able to afford electricity, or may be too far from centralised fossil-fuelled grids. For these families and communities facing energy poverty, the lack of access to sufficient electricity for basic needs and services creates barriers to breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

A shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy so as to address climate change can thus also provide major additional social benefits. The transition can help countries and communities to “leapfrog” dependence on fossil fuels, and go straight to benefiting from sustainable and renewably-sourced electricity. Locally-based renewables can offer the opportunity for communities to generate their own electricity through small-scale solar and wind power technologies, without having to wait for the electricity grid which may never arrive. Solar panels and wind turbines can be sited near or even in communities - for example on the rooftops of homes, or in fields, with local control of the energy production. Renewables can thus provide electricity directly to homes and community buildings, and have potential to bring huge and multiple benefits to marginalised communities in terms of livelihoods, education, health, security and reducing food waste. Energy access can significantly improve opportunities for women and girls, as it can save time and labour, for example by needing to reduce time fetching wood for cooking, and free up more time and available light for education, livelihoods and ensuring food security. Strategies to improve energy access must also go beyond providing for family needs, to also cater for local sectors such as small-scale agriculture and small and medium-scale enterprises that can create the basis for local economic development and resilience.

Renewable energy can provide the chance for distributed, equitable and more democratic access to clean energy, particularly if decision-making processes are participatory and inclusive, and empower women and marginalised community members to benefit from these developments. The just transition in energy must therefore address unequal access to energy, and seek to address the inequality of energy poverty.<sup>7</sup>

International climate finance from wealthy countries can and should be used to help improve energy access and enable countries to avoid being trapped in the fossil fuel era. As the world looks to use economic stimulus packages in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, this provides a major opportunity to kick-start a just, green recovery.

**“Energy access can significantly improve opportunities for women and girls, as it can save time and labour and free up more time for education, livelihoods and ensuring food security.”**



A boy sits outside his house during a heat wave in Nibi, India. The village hasn't had electricity in two months.  
© Mansi Thapliyal/ActionAid

<sup>7</sup> [www.actionaidusa.org/publications/power-people-delivering-promise-decentralized-community-controlled-renewable-energy-access/](http://www.actionaidusa.org/publications/power-people-delivering-promise-decentralized-community-controlled-renewable-energy-access/)



# 5. A JUST TRANSITION IN AGRICULTURE ENSURING FOOD SYSTEMS ARE FIT FOR PURPOSE IN AN ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Angelina Ba Ical lives in the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala, where the water has been contaminated by neighbouring palm oil plantations. © Fabio Erdos/ActionAid

Agriculture is a major source of the world's GHG emissions. When taking into account the emissions from activities across the cycle of production and consumption – including deforestation, production of synthetic nitrogen fertilisers, soil loss, livestock emissions, transport, heating for greenhouses, imports of commodities and waste – food systems can account for around 20-30% of global GHGs. The bulk of these emissions come from countries with highly industrialised systems of crop and livestock production, and those where there are high levels of over-consumption and waste. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Land (August 2018)<sup>8</sup> confirms that to become fit for purpose in an era of climate change, agriculture must move away from intensive and industrialised approaches towards food systems based on agroecology and less and better meat.

Agriculture is the basis of food security for almost everyone on earth, the source of livelihoods for more than 1 billion people (or one in three working people on earth), the foundation of many economies, and at the same time is the sector that is most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Efforts to dramatically cut GHGs in agriculture could thus bring major disruptions to millions of peoples' lives and food security, if not done extremely carefully.

One of the major challenges to changing farming practices is that many people working in agriculture may be concerned that climate interventions imposed on them by distant decision-makers might harm their futures. Farmers may feel demonised and defensive that they are being blamed for the climate crisis. They may be wary that top-down and simplistic climate policies will leave them and large sections of rural communities stranded, with few options for secure livelihoods. There is already deep injustice across the food and agriculture system. Farmers and workers are often squeezed and exploited by a system that concentrates wealth, land and power in fewer and fewer hands, women face particular barriers, and global food insecurity is growing – not least among farmers. A just transition in agriculture must address these fundamental inequalities, shift to food systems that work for people, nature and the climate, and provide support to farmers, workers and communities to make the shift to a positive future.<sup>9</sup>

### Women farmers feed the world but face particular barriers

Women make up 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, and in East and Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa they are thought to account for about 50% of the farming population<sup>10</sup> – and quite possibly more. But women farmers face numerous gender-specific barriers that add to their difficulties. Cultural and patriarchal norms mean that in many parts of the world, women are expected to fetch firewood and water, which not only takes time away from farming, but becomes more difficult if water sources dry up in the face of climate change. Crop failures and loss of livelihoods as a result of climate impacts will often lead girls to be pulled out of schooling before their brothers, and increased hunger from crop failures also leads to increases in violence against women.

Policies can create additional barriers. Even though women may account for half of the farmers in many countries, it is often assumed that men are the default farmer, resulting in policies and services that are male-oriented. Policies that discourage women's land tenure or access to finance reduce their ability to make investments for more effective farming and adaptation. In many countries extension services ignore women farmers, only providing support and advice to men. Cultural pressures or low literacy and confidence often discourage women from sharing their perspectives in local decision-making processes, meaning that their challenges often go unaddressed. If women were to have the same access to productive resources, they could lift 100-150 million people out of hunger.<sup>11</sup> A gender-just transition is an opportunity to advance women's rights in agriculture, and strengthen food security, resilience and climate action as a whole.

### Hunger and malnutrition

The recent 2020 State of Food Security and Nutrition (SOFI)<sup>12</sup> report highlighted the shocking fact that worldwide over two billion people did not have regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food in 2019, and 750 million people were exposed to severe levels of food insecurity. Food insecurity is higher among women than men. The Coronavirus pandemic is likely to escalate this crisis. Many of the world's hungry are themselves food producers, and women farmers – and their children – are particularly at risk of hunger<sup>13</sup>. A just



Amie Diouf from Senegal has been trained in keeping table gardens, in order to adapt to climate change. © Clément Tardif/ActionAid

transition in agriculture must address the root causes of hunger, including the structural economic policies that disadvantage and undermine smallholder and women farmers, their families and communities.

### Shifting from industrial crop production to agroecology

The industrialisation of crop production has been identified as a key cause of the climate crisis. The widespread use of agrochemicals such as synthetic nitrogen fertilisers is a particular problem. These not only require the burning fossil fuels for their production, but when synthetic fertilisers are applied to soils this harms key soil biota such as mycorrhizae, meaning that the soil carbon that they store degrades to atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, contributing further to climate change and weakening the soil's ability to store water. The industrialisation of agriculture has also pushed farmers to use and then become dependent on narrow range of corporate-purchased seeds, leading to the loss of seed diversity and the resilience, as well as leading to the concentration of control and wealth and in fewer hands.

Agroecology is an important solution to the challenge of feeding the world in an era of climate change. By working with nature, increasing biodiversity and avoiding harmful agro-chemicals that harm the environment, human health and the climate, agroecology improves resilience and adaptation to climate impacts, and significantly reduces the GHG emissions released in the process of producing agrochemicals and growing food.

When using agroecology, farmers can also retain more of their income as they do not need to purchase agribusiness inputs such as seeds and chemicals, and are less squeezed by the corporate sector. Smallholder farmers, particularly women farmers who may not have deep pockets, can particularly benefit from agroecology.

### Producing and consuming less and better meat

The high contribution of meat (particularly red meat) and livestock to global GHGs is now very much in the climate spotlight. The high volumes of livestock feed grown to meet factory farming demand are driving the

<sup>8</sup> [www.ipcc.ch/srccl/](http://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/)

<sup>9</sup> <https://actionaid.org/publications/2019/principles-just-transition-agriculture>

<sup>10</sup> [www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability\\_pathways/docs/Factsheet\\_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Factsheet_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization. "Smallholders and Family Farmers: Factsheet" 2012. [www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability\\_pathways/docs/Factsheet\\_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/nr/sustainability_pathways/docs/Factsheet_SMALLHOLDERS.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=20000&nr=6909&menu=2993>

<sup>13</sup> Botreau, Héliène and Marc J. Cohen. "Gender Inequalities and Food Insecurity." Oxfam International. July 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gender-inequalities-and-food-insecurity-ten-years-after-food-price-crisis-why-are-women>

escalation of GHG emissions through both deforestation (regions of Latin America such as the Amazon, Cerrado and Chaco Grande are particularly affected) as well as the emissions associated with fertiliser production and soil degradation resulting from industrialised crop production. Factory farming also increases the amount of livestock grown overall, hence increasing the total production of methane emissions and requiring huge amounts of land for the production of feed.

These trends are resulting in calls for “less and better meat” as a climate strategy. “Better” meat refers to animals that are reared agroecologically, in more natural conditions, eating natural grass and food waste instead of imported grain, and in more harmony with nature. If done as part of mixed farming systems, smallholding or pastoralist systems, livestock rearing can be far less harmful for the climate. In the global South, traditional livestock cultivation can have a low climate impact, and can even provide environmental benefits if done in a traditional manner and on a small scale.

In the global North, industrialised livestock production means that per capita meat production is high. Per capita consumption in the global South is typically low compared to the global North<sup>14</sup>, so many developing and low-income countries would not necessarily need to prioritise targeting traditional livestock sectors as part of their climate transitions. For people on low-protein diets, particularly poorer people in the global South, policies must remember to include strategies to increase people’s access to healthy protein.

Studies suggest that a sustainable global level of meat consumption would involve a maximum of two five-ounce servings of meat per person per week<sup>15</sup>. Reducing land used for livestock feed and meat production, can also free up land for agroecological production for human consumption, reduce deforestation pressure, and possibly free up land for the restoration of biodiverse ecosystems.

The IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land recommends that alternative sources of protein such as pulses, nuts and seeds, become a larger part of people’s diets, to ensure both human and planetary health<sup>16</sup>.

### Protecting and restoring ecosystems

Earth’s ecosystems provide a critical role in regulating the planet’s climate by absorbing industrial CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Natural biodiverse and primary ecosystems are shown to have up to 40 times the capacity to absorb and retain carbon, when compared to monoculture, exotic, fast-growing tree plantations<sup>17</sup>. They are shown to be far more resilient to the increasing climate risks posed by drought and fire. Studies show that the most effective approach to protecting biodiverse ecosystems is by securing the land access and tenure rights of indigenous peoples, who effectively use their traditional knowledge and cultural practices to protect the ecosystems on which they have depended for many generations.<sup>18</sup> Further studies show that there is also huge potential for the restoration of biodiverse ecosystems such as forests and peatlands<sup>19</sup>.

However, the expansion of intensive or industrial crop and livestock production is a major driver of forest loss, which presents a serious challenge to efforts to solve the climate crisis. High levels of consumption in the global North – for example high demand for beef, soya for livestock feed, timber, palm oil and biofuels – are often the biggest root causes of the trends driving the most aggressive destruction of ecosystems in the global South. Countries and regions with high levels of consumption and dependence on imports must recognise their own responsibility for driving the destruction of the Earth’s critical ecosystems such as the Amazon and Cerrado.

Policies on agriculture and land in both the global North and South must therefore work to integrate strategies to protect, restore and where possible scale-up biodiverse ecosystems to provide valuable climate and other ecosystem functions. Strategies must include efforts to significantly reduce overall consumption, including imports, to strictly regulate the sustainability and human rights compliance of those products that make it to market and are imported, and to secure the land tenure and human rights of indigenous peoples.



Dora Klu from Ghana shows her harvest. © ActionAid

<sup>14</sup> Our World in Data. “Meat Supply per person, 2013.” <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/meat-supply-per-person>

<sup>15</sup> Climate, Land, Ambition and Rights Alliance (CLARA) “Missing Pathways to 1.5°C: The role of the land sector in ambitious climate action” (2018), [www.climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org/report](http://www.climatelandambitionrightsalliance.org/report)

<sup>16</sup> [www.ipcc.ch/srccl/](http://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/)

<sup>17</sup> Pearce, Fred. “Why Green Pledges Will Not Create the Natural Forests We Need.” *Yale Environment* 360. April 16, 2019. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-green-pledges-will-not-create-the-natural-forests-we-need>

<sup>18</sup> Dooley, K. “Missing Pathways.” 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Kate Dooley & Sivan Kartha, 2018. “Land-based negative emissions: risks for climate mitigation and impacts on sustainable development,” *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, Springer, vol. 18(1), pages 79-98, February.



# 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOM- MENDATIONS

When developing climate plans and policies in energy and food systems, governments should take into account ActionAid's 4 principles for just transitions in extractives and agriculture. They must:

**Address - and not exacerbate - inequalities:**

- Climate policies must recognise that vulnerable mining and farming communities may already face precarious livelihoods, and may not be able to bear the burden or cost of climate transitions unless they are given support and positive incentives to do so.
- Just transitions must address the lack of access to secure food, nutrition, energy and livelihoods faced by poor and vulnerable communities, and that women face particular challenges and burdens.
- When shifting away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy, the transformation of energy systems must take into account the potentially harmful impacts of renewable energy's increased demand on metal and mineral extraction, and must not simply shift exploitation and land grabs to new areas.

**Transform systems to work for people, nature and the climate:**

- In bringing about the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, the renewables industry must reduce their need for new raw materials by increasing their material efficiency (i.e. reducing the amount of resources needed) and designing their products to be more easily recycled.
- Significant and active efforts are needed to improve and scale up the sector for recycling of metals and minerals, and this must be regulated by very strong labour and environmental standards.
- The renewables industry must take great care to ensure the responsible sourcing of metals and minerals, including by requiring that where new mining is required, and that this is governed by strong labour and environmental standards.
- Agriculture systems must be restructured to be based around agroecology, less and better meat, and the protection and restoration of ecosystems.

**Ensure inclusiveness and participation:**

- Transition plans must be developed through the inclusive participation of workers, farmers, women, communities and stakeholders, especially those that are marginalised, and taking into account the perspectives of communities and sectors that will be involved in or affected by the transition.
- Communities must have the right to reject new mining developments, and the views of women and marginalised community members must count as equal to that of supposedly high-status community members.
- Unions and civil society organisations can play a key role in supporting workers, farmers, women and their

communities to organise, strengthen confidence and present their perspectives in key planning and policy-making processes.

**Develop comprehensive plans and policy frameworks:**

- National climate policies and plans including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPS) and agriculture policies should incorporate just transition processes for energy, extractives and agriculture into their strategies, to accelerate shifts to renewable energy, agroecology, and less and better meat, in ways that are fair to all workers and communities and by putting social justice at the core of climate action.
- Comprehensive plans to shift away from polluting sectors such as fossil fuels and industrial agriculture must include strategies and support for economic diversification, social protection and safety nets, training and reskilling, new routes to market, re-allocation of subsidies, inclusive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative policies, and strong regulation of the corporate sector.
- Strong and mandatory labour, social, environmental and gender-responsive standards at national and international must govern all sectors involved. Corporations must undertake gender-responsive human rights due diligence, to address human rights abuses and environmental harm in the extractive and agriculture sectors.
- Wealthy industrialised countries who have the most historical responsibility for causing the climate crisis must provide their fair share of climate finance to low-income countries in the global South, in order to support just transitions to greener pathways and strengthen resilience to climate impacts.
- As economic stimulus and aid packages roll out in order to assist countries to economically recover from the far-reaching impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic, these financial packages should be used to make the huge investments needed to transform the key sectors of energy and agriculture to be fit for purpose in an era of climate change. The effort to recover from Covid-19 presents an unprecedented opportunity for a Just and Green Recovery. With new systems and structures rolling out, this is a key moment to make sure that the transformations are done in a way that works for people, nature and the climate.



Global Climate Strike in New York. © ActionAid



Global Climate Strike in New York. © ActionAid

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