



Making Just Transition Happen

The Role of the Just Transition Work Programme in 2025

May 24–25, 2025 | Gamboa, Panama

Since its inclusion in the Paris Agreement, just transition has grown in visibility and space in climate discussions. Multiple initiatives inside and beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have emerged, and it is increasingly seen as a key to enabling prosperity pathways for workers, communities, and countries.

With the adoption of the Just Transition Work Programme (JTWP) at the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) in 2022, the scope and ambition of just transition negotiations reached a new level, and expectations have built for COP30 in Brazil to deliver concrete decisions that advance just transition pathways through international cooperation. At a time where multilateralism faces deep challenges, just transition offers the possibility of an agreed outcome that speaks to the majorities' needs and demands, and allows governments across all regions to benefit.

This paper summarizes the main inputs and insights from the convening “Making Just Transition Happen: The Role of the Just Transition Work Programme in 2025,” organized by the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and Climate Action Network International (CAN-I). It summarizes potential outcomes of the Work Programme in 2025, presented by participants, and key features of the conversations they sparked.

Introduction

The convening “Making Just Transition Happen: The Role of the Just Transition Work Programme in 2025” took place May 24–25, 2025, at the Gamboa Rainforest Reserve in Panama.

It brought together key stakeholders for an informal conversation on potential COP30 decisions related to just transition as a means to strengthen the social fabric for a positive negotiating environment before the next formal negotiation this June in Bonn, creating the space to dive into ideas and stimulate convergence on potential COP30 outcomes on just transition and the JTWP so it can contribute to its full potential in achieving the Paris Agreement goals.

The Just Transition Landscape

Multiple experiences of just transition initiatives have been developed—local, national, sectoral, international—and show the breadth and growth of just transition approaches across some very different realities.

Participants highlighted that the Paris Agreement temperature target of 1.5°C—a threshold beyond which humanity faces existential threats—requires deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from all countries. The fact that



the conversation on just transition has been mainly focused on energy—coal phaseout, transitioning away from fossil fuels—is a testimony to the challenges faced but also the belief by many that just transition can help ensure that this shift is managed in an orderly, equitable, and ultimately more successful way, making the most of the opportunities provided by the transition and without leaving anyone behind.

Some participants shared that as conversations have developed over time, it is clear the principles of just transition are also applicable in areas outside of mitigation, and there is an opportunity to ensure that interventions on adaptation are similarly managed in an orderly and equitable manner. Issues of adaptation often similarly entail loss of livelihoods, relocation, and development of new economic opportunities, and can benefit from the same framings that help with those issues in transitions caused by mitigation action.

Participants highlighted many examples and learnings drawn from them—from just transition approaches leading to institutional innovations (Scotland, Ireland, South Africa), legislative frameworks (Canada, Australia), and consultative approaches (Colombia, Chile) to what was seen by many as the most complete just transition approach to date in Spain. International approaches, including those connected to Just Energy Transition in the G20, or the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) were flagged, although the latter has drawn significant critique. A sense of fragmentation and duplication of efforts when addressing just transition was shared by many.

Participants flagged a challenging context for climate action, with multiple tensions between environmental regulations and the expression of social needs (e.g., jobs, income), and many conversations in their countries or sectors about who pays to ensure the just element is covered. In many countries, the population does not seem reassured by current levels of ambition on just transition, and affordability has become a way to push against climate action. Some participants flagged that the significant economic, social, and environmental benefits of transitioning away from fossil fuels have not been visible enough in the conversation on just transition.

Limited consultation, social dialogue, and anticipation of social impacts—crucial for strengthening social protection—seem to be affecting progress.

The importance of just transition approaches to address the needs of both formal and informal workers, and going beyond the labor force to cover communities' needs, was generally shared. Similarly, while the need to work on just transition in connection to shifts in the energy sector were acknowledged, there was strong sentiment that the conversation must also incorporate the agriculture, food, and land-use sector and adaptation, among other things. Finally, challenges related to macroeconomic imbalances generated by losses in fossil fuel revenue were also flagged.

Going beyond the justice elements within countries, important challenges in the just transition landscape were flagged in

connection with the difficulties of achieving economic diversification, both in developed and developing countries. In the specific context of developing countries, the challenges of accessing credit at fair conditions, attracting sustainable investments, reskilling, transitioning people to new jobs, and finding economic alternatives appeared more acute, notably in Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

From a governance perspective, best practices show the importance of continuity, top-down vision setting, and bottom-up implementation. Institutional coordination across ministries at the national level will be important, as well as regional coordination for certain just transition approaches at scale, most notably on things like grid interconnectivity, to avoid actions in one place harming another or working toward counter aims. The disconnect between international initiatives and national priorities was also brought to the table, flagging challenges of JETPs and other Multilateral Development Bank (MDB) initiatives. The importance of bold cooperation and coordination at the international level was also highlighted.

Thoughts were shared on both the scale of current just transition practices to date—still relatively small when compared to the challenge—as well as the fact that countries are not all starting from same point. There are power imbalances at play, as well as very different capacities to use policy and fiscal levers to make the transition happen, which had some participants pointing back to the importance of the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities principles of the UNFCCC in this context.

Participants flagged that many barriers to just transition are dealt with in silos (e.g., debt, investment regimes, intellectual property rights, and access to technology) but that just transition as a framing can facilitate a different conversation and approach that mitigates some of these issues.

Although semantics and definitions did not appear as a major challenge to engage on just transition, many participants expressed concern on the relatively disjointed initiatives aimed at defining it. Some still considered the just transition concept weak or broad, although noted that the inclusive nature of the concept allows positive adaptations to different contexts, and that there are multiple pathways for just transition that depend on countries having differentiated targets when it comes to Paris Agreement implementation.

Participants noted that some actors have harnessed language around justice to further the interest of polluting sectors, notably fossil fuels. In some countries this has led to developing just transition-like approaches without using the term “just transition” (e.g., Canada with its Sustainable Jobs Act).



Potential JTWP Concrete Outcomes in COP30

The following summarizes the rationale and main elements of the ideas proposed during the workshop, as well as highlighting some reactions.

It is to be noted that for the majority of the workshop's participants, it was the first time they were engaging on these ideas, and they did so with curiosity and openness. The summary of the discussions will never do justice to the richness of the exchanges nor provide a full account of each reaction. No participant was asked to express support or opposition for each proposal, so neither of those should be assumed based on this account.

Just Transition Principles or Safeguards in the UNFCCC Process

Rationale: There is a need to provide high-level guidance to ensure that just transition actions are equitable, inclusive, and rights based. Having shared principles fosters policy coherence nationally and internationally, supports guiding implementation, and would strengthen clarity for other aspects of the COP30 decision (i.e., including just transition in NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDs, or the Global Just Transition Mechanism). Shared principles could also provide a clearer scope that would help ensure just transition remains a practical, actionable tool, particularly in the UNFCCC context. These could use elements from existing frameworks (e.g., ILO) as a basis, while establishing shared expectations under the UNFCCC.

Proposal: Dimensions of what the principles would build upon were introduced, including: alignment with the Paris Agreement (so that just transition is seen as the “how” to achieve agreed goals under the PA), rights and participation (human and labor rights, Free, Prior and Informed Consent, engagement of affected people including workers); addressing, not deepening, inequalities (decent work, skills development, gender and age responsiveness); Means of Implementation and international cooperation.

Discussion: Many saw these principles and safeguards as a foundational element to a larger transition package. Their connection to an action-oriented approach, such as the global mechanism, could be very positive. Conversely, not reaching agreement on principles at COP30 in Belém, Brazil might jeopardize future action on just transition because there will be no common basis for implementation.

Many shared the potentially powerful political message that agreeing on these principles and safeguards would deliver, helping to rebuild trust in the multilateral system.

On the other hand, this idea must deal with the complex navigation of adding value to what exists (different principles sitting under ILO, G20, MDBs, etc.). There was a general sense that UNFCCC

principles should build on what exists, notably on ILO Guidelines, and broaden to aspects within the UNFCCC.

Concerns were flagged that negotiation on safeguards and principles could reopen the scope of the JTWP and possibly present a challenge for developing those principles in time for Belém.

The importance of ensuring these principles do not create more-complex reporting requirements was also flagged.

Just Transition in NDCs, NAPs and LT-LEDs

Rationale: Integrating just transition in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategies (LT-LEDs) provides a crucial basis to leverage the contribution of climate action for decent work, social equity, and sustainable development. The uptake of just transition in NDCs has increased over time. There is, however, scope for uptake on a larger scale and with a systematic and action-oriented approach, one that also encourages Parties to consider connections between just transition and adaptation.

Proposal: Encourage countries to embed just transition plans and actions in their official climate-planning documents to align long-term development and climate goals with social justice and equity.

Discussion: Integrating just transition more explicitly into planning instruments was widely seen as a way to operationalize Paris Agreement commitments. Participants discussed incentives, safeguards, and support to ensure countries can implement just transition in ways aligned with the Paris Agreement—without adding burdensome new obligations. There was particular interest in guidance and finance to support just transition integration in Long-Term Strategies. It is to be noted that this proposal has been on the table in negotiations, so the potential and challenges have been widely discussed in multiple forums.

A Mandate to Finance Just Transition

Rationale: Finance for specific just transition policies is currently not explicitly within the mandate of institutions delivering climate finance. Social dialogue and consultation mechanisms; social protection policies; policies related to care, ecosystem restoration, skills and reskilling policies; and economic diversification interventions are all critical and acknowledged as part of just transition policies but not seen as mitigation or adaptation policies, and therefore sidelined in climate finance.

Proposal: Recognition by the COP that the design and implementation of just transition policies, plans, programmes, and practices support climate ambition and are therefore eligible to receive climate finance.

Discussion: Many participants found the proposal useful, although many flagged that there is an urgent need for more and better



provision of climate finance to developing countries to advance just transition and the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

The conversation emphasized the scale of need and the gaps in current financial architecture. Participants raised issues of additionality, access, eligibility, and the risk of reinforcing unjust finance flows. Some supported this as a just transition “signal” to guide climate finance institutions and expressed interest in using the JTWP to identify barriers, needs, and pathways toward more-equitable financing. Some saw this proposal as a pragmatic way to address the issue while remaining within feasible political and institutional boundaries. There is potential, for instance, for a short, clear decision paragraph under the CMA that sends a constructive political signal without opening the door to a new, standalone finance track.

Some participants indicated that certain just transition dimensions appeared “ripe” for being supported as climate funding—such as social protection, social dialogue, and ecosystem restoration—if brought as a necessary piece for achieving climate plans and aligned with shared just transition principles/safeguards.

The importance of connecting this proposal and the agreement on principles was also flagged, in order to demarcate what is being promoted as climate finance.

Conversations on the needs of countries on just transition and how those could be fleshed out, along with the barriers for accessing finance would be important and could be treated in the mechanism.

A Global Just Transition Mechanism

Rationale: At the global level, multiple initiatives on just transition are being discussed, developed, and/or implemented, often with climate as a driving force. On top of many of these initiatives not sharing the same baseline (which could be addressed by the agreed-on principles above), they are often not coordinated, nor supportive of the Paris Agreement in a holistic manner; they tend to focus on narrow sectors or address specific challenges. While the narrow scope of those initiatives is not problematic per se, the absence of a coordinating space to identify what is missing and what could be done to accelerate positive change has been identified as a gap. In addition, being able to act upon those challenges by deepening knowledge and by taking action when the solutions have been identified could be a proactive approach.

Proposal: Establish the Belém Action Mechanism for Just Transition (BAM) to accelerate, consolidate, and achieve a holistic just transition across the whole economy, within and between countries, through international cooperation based on the principles of equity and Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capacities (CBDR-RC).

The Mechanism will focus on filling gaps and overcoming barriers to achieving just transition; creating synergies, providing recommendations, and avoiding replication of efforts on just transition

among mechanisms and bodies within and outside the UNFCCC; identifying ways forward on international cooperation and means of implementation on just transition, including identification of non-debt-inducing finance, technology transfer, and capacity building to countries in the Global South; and developing and creating access to knowledge on just transition pathways, tools, and best practices. Building on past experiences, the BAM should be supported by a UNFCCC Coordinating Entity with meaningful inclusion and participation of constituency observers (with each having a full seat at the table) and other stakeholders, a knowledge generation component (which could be based on the JTWP); and an action and support component.

Discussion: Some participants expressed their enthusiasm for this idea, notably for its potential to facilitate coherence and synergies across and beyond UNFCCC on just transition. With dialogues under the JTWP seen as not actionable enough, the following were seen as positive dimensions of this mechanism: strengthening the implementation dimension of just transition, notably through enhanced coordination among various actors (government agencies, UN constituencies), capacity building technological and financial support assessments, and consolidating a network of experts.

Questions were raised on the pertinence of locating the Mechanism within the UNFCCC, the importance of connecting it with local needs, and broader concerns on creating new institutional architecture at a time when too many bodies exist. In particular, concern was expressed that new structures risk adding complexity at a time when Parties are still navigating the recently established Just Transition Work Programme itself. Some argued that improving the coherence and effectiveness of existing mechanisms, including making the JTWP dialogues more actionable or bringing missing elements (e.g., a platform for matchmaking), may be a more efficient and politically feasible approach.

The importance of ensuring that the structure reflects and is better linked to different functions needed for just transition was also raised.

National Mechanisms for People’s Participation in Just Transition Measures/Policies

Rationale: Many countries still lack the national mechanisms and processes necessary to ensure that transitions are just. Transitions have failed to abide by just transition principles, causing harm and leaving affected groups behind. Greater inclusion of affected groups in decision making is needed to achieve just transition.

Proposal: Call on countries to establish national mechanisms for people’s participation in just transition measures or policies, ensuring the involvement and agency of workers, affected communities, women, youth, Indigenous peoples, and all other sectors at the national and local levels.



There was broad interest in institutional approaches that enable participatory, context-specific planning and implementation. Many welcomed the flexibility this approach brings to countries, notably in terms of the ability to connect to what already exists. Many supported strengthening or reorienting existing tripartite bodies rather than creating new ones. Key questions included how to ensure adequate capacity, how to secure finance, and how to connect national mechanisms with global coordination.

Reflections on Overall “Package”/Outcome

Some questions were raised during the meeting about other aspects of the JTWP decision expected at COP30 (notably aspects connecting to the outcomes of the dialogues or other political messages). This led to a discussion about how the different proposals connect with each other and with the larger COP30 JTWP Decision.

The idea was introduced that a COP30 decision on the JTWP should both take stock (by bringing the outcomes of the dialogues and a few key political messages) and take action (by agreeing on actionable measures). Some participants saw the proposals as a mutually reinforcing package where all countries move forward with greater clarity on what just transition entails in the context of the UNFCCC (i.e., agreeing on principles, encouraging their integration in NDC, NAPs, and LT-LEDS), while making a bold step toward fostering cooperative implementation of just transition (launching the global mechanism, encouraging the finance mandate for just transition, promoting national institutional approaches). It is important to note that this opinion was not shared across the room, as certain proposals contained concerning elements for some participants, as indicated above.

Some key points of convergence include the broad recognition of the need for flexible, nationally appropriate approaches to just transition. There was broad agreement that COP30 should deliver a coherent, implementable package on the JTWP, although differences emerged on what that could look like.

For some, the disappointing outcomes on climate finance from COP29 put the feasibility of high ambition on just transition at risk. Some participants indicated that it would be preferable to use existing architecture in a better manner, rather than creating anew.

There seems to be interest in better connecting work across mechanisms, including finance, dialogue outputs, and institutional platforms, and a shared desire for the UNFCCC to better connect with territorial realities and act as an enabler of national ambition on all aspects of the Paris Agreement.

Final Reflections

This workshop reaffirmed that to make the just transition happen, we must keep building bridges between systems, sectors, and people. The energy, openness, and creativity in the room signaled that we may be more ready than ever to move beyond statements and toward decisions.

There is momentum to take forward—with flexibility, boldness, and the spirit of collaboration that was so present in Panama.



About Us

The Stanley Center for Peace and Security partners with people, organizations, and the greater global community to drive policy progress in three issue areas—mitigating climate change, avoiding the use of nuclear weapons, and preventing mass violence and atrocities. The center was created in 1956 and maintains its independence while developing forums for diverse perspectives and ideas. To learn more about our recent publications and upcoming events, please visit stanleycenter.org.

