IF IT'S NOT FEMINIST, IT'S NOT JUST.

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL
GENDER JUSTICE & DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY

WOMEN'S VOICES, ANALYSIS AND ACTION TOWARDS A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

Friends of the Earth International

mobilise resist transform

IF IT'S NOT FEMINIST, IT'S NOT JUST.

NOVEMBER | 2021

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WE BELIEVE THAT OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE WILL BE BETTER BECAUSE OF WHAT WE DO.

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD 3

1. INTRODUCTION 4
2. WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CURRENT ENERGY SYSTEM? 5
3. NEITHER JUST, NOR FEMINIST: FALSE SOLUTIONS 9
4. FEMINIST JUST ENERGY TRANSITION 14
5. COVID-19: CHALLENGES 18
6. CONCLUSION 19

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FOREWORD
JUST AND FEMINIST ENERGY TRANSITION: ELEMENTS FOR THE DEBATE

In the last decade, the Just Transition rhetoric has become part of the global discussion around addressing climate change, but yet again the "Just" in Just Transition is failing to address the systemic interlinked injustices that are integral to the current fossil energy system, including patriarchal oppression.

In late 2020, 100 activists from the Friends of the Earth International federation around the globe came together with allied organisations in a series of webinars to analyse what a Just Energy Transition means from a feminist perspective.

These webinars were organised by a coordination team from across working groups, such as Gender Justice and Dismantling Patriarchy working group (GJDP WG), and member organisations of the Friends of the Earth International Federation. This paper grew out of the rich analysis present in these discussions. This document provides a synthesis of our discussions about the Just Energy Transition. We also hope to highlight relevant elements for future discussion and inclusion in the Just Transition debate. We hope it serves as a tool for fruitful discussion, convergences and collective strategising in the near future.

For decades women have been at the forefront of resisting and creating alternatives to fossil fuel industries. Women also bear the brunt of the fossil fuel industries' negative social, economic, health and political impacts.

The patriarchal extractivist system that exploits nature, territories and people, is fundamental to neoliberal capitalist accumulation and has led to the climate and nature crises. That is why we believe that without a feminist perspective integrated in the system change we are working towards, there will be no justice in the Just Energy Transition. There will also not be a transition.

Months into the Covid-19 pandemic, we were witnessing and experiencing the gender impacts of yet another global crisis, which has laid bare the multiple, interlinking systemic injustices and vulnerabilities in our global world. We see women operating in solidarity on the Covid-19 frontlines to keep people alive and their communities going, but at the same time bearing the brunt of the pandemic socially, politically and economically; particularly black and Indigenous women, women of colour, LBTQ women, peasant and working class women.

Women as political subjects are central to the real lasting solutions we need to create.

This paper highlights our collective vision of the Just Energy Transition, as expressed and discussed by the participants of the 2020 Friends of the Earth International webinars, and based on the experiences and perspectives of women across the globe and their fierce feminist demands for a system change that will be inclusive and just for us all.

01

INTRODUCTION

We live in times of multiple and deeply interconnected systemic crises. More than ever, we need to transform our societies and economies to prevent a planetary collapse. A just and feminist energy transition is needed as a critical part of the future society we want to build, in which the sustainability of life – people and planet – will be placed at the centre.

This paper aims at providing a synthesis of some elements for the discussion about a Just Energy Transition and feminism. Its sources are the rich and powerful feminist discussions and processes being built by the Friends of the Earth International federation and its allied movements and organisations.

In this paper we will:

- Name and shame the current energy system, emphasising how it reinforces socio-economic injustice and inequalities.
- Identify false solutions and their key components including greenwashing and purplewashing.
- Highlight some shared principles and values that must be a part of a just and feminist energy transition, founded on existing experiences and ongoing debates.
- Discuss how the Covid-19 pandemic illuminates the urgency and necessity of system change-based transitions that acknowledge and value the principles of interdependence and ecodependence.
- Share the voices of many women who are resisting false solutions to climate change and building a just energy transition.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CURRENT ENERGY SYSTEM?

02

Energy is currently produced, distributed, and consumed in unjust and unsustainable ways, relying on the continued exploitation of people and nature. The current energy system is one of the main drivers of climate change, which is already unevenly impacting communities and ecosystems all over the world. The poorest, especially women and children, are paying the highest price, although they did not create this crisis.[1]

At the root of this injustice lies the fact that the basis of capitalism is the accumulation of capital. Therefore, the profits of a select few are consistently placed above the sustainability of the lives of the majority of the people and the planet.

"For Friends of the Earth, a just transition is about recognising that we face a very deep systemic crisis, which comes from putting the accumulation of capital above people, livelihoods, and life-supporting ecological systems. This system is then sustained by a set of oppressions that are imposed on people. It needs changing at its roots. When we talk about the energy system, we are talking about the way we organise our life, society, production and economy.

This energy system is founded on injustice. It generates greenhouse gases and creates the climate crisis. It dismantles working class rights, and promotes the exploitation of women's bodies and labour. It brings a concentration of power and resources to just a few hands. It leads to the destruction of forests, rivers and the way we eat and farm. It is an extremely unjust and perverse system that promotes systemic oppression against many groups including Indigenous peoples, Afro communities, fishermen, peasants, women, working and popular classes."

Karin Nansen, Friends of the Earth International.

"Climate change and the global energy crisis threaten the lives and livelihoods of billions of people worldwide. The primary sources of greenhouse gases are the burning of fossil fuels for energy, industry and transport, industrial agriculture, and deforestation. So, to stop the climate crisis, it is absolutely critical to move away from fossil fuels and to move towards socially-owned renewable energy. However, climate change is not the only crisis we are facing as a planet. We are also facing many other inter-related crises. The climate crisis combines with an energy crisis that leaves almost 600 million people around the world without access to electricity... The current energy system is not only creating the climate crisis, it is not serving the needs of millions."

Dipti Bhatnagar, Friends of the Earth International.

This pattern has its historical roots in colonialism, and it is currently maintained by the neocolonial, neoliberal, and extractivist global political economy.[2]

"The world's major powers understood early on that access to and control over fossil energy – its exploration, extraction, and processing stages – means being able to pull many strings on the world stage. Bloody wars have been fought in the past decades to secure access to oil and gas. Coups have been instigated, democracies have fallen over it (or never got a chance to flourish), dictatorships have been able to maintain themselves over it. Placing one´s nation centre stage in the fossil chain means one can strengthen the national economy (as energy access is crucial to building strong economies), but it also fosters dominance over other countries through energy dependence – a dominance, which can then be exploited for other political purposes. This is what fossil geopolitics has always been about. This is why fossil giants sleep in the same bed as political giants... And this is something that will be – and is – happening again when it comes to the raw materials and minerals needed for the energy transition."

Isabelle Geuskens, Milieudefensie / Friends of the Earth Netherlands.

Such dynamics are advanced by drivers of the dirty energy system. One of the major drivers of this broken, unjust system are transnational corporations (TNCs). Backed by the law and its multiple instruments (such as profit-sharing agreements, free trade agreements and bilateral treaties), they are ensured unlimited access to energy sources and continued impunity for their human rights' violations and environmental abuses. Their actions are usually backed by states, who repeatedly abandon their redistributive functions to act as enablers of private interests.

Some states promote fossil fuel-related imperialism. Other states provide financial support to dirty energy projects – such as fossil fuel or large hydro-dam projects – through their export credit agencies (ECAs), using public finance mechanisms to push dirty energy and worsen climate change, even if this is against the Paris Agreement principles which countries say they adhere to at home.

States have also often mobilised their police or military to ensure that dirty energy projects will go ahead, even if there is opposition. This deepens their dependence on extractivist revenues, ultimately promoting predatory development models that do not challenge who has access to and/or control over land.

WORLD'S RICHEST 1%

PRODUCE TWICE AS MUCH CARBON POLLUTION

AS THE POOREST HALF

The richest one percent of the world's population are responsible for more than twice as much carbon pollution as the 3.1 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity over a 250-year period of unprecedented emissions growth.

Oxfam's report Confronting Carbon Inequality, September 2020.

Additionally, many states subscribe to the overall neoliberal tendency towards energy privatisation and liberalisation, turning energy into a commodity and yet another sphere of profit maximisation. This leads to unequal and inequitable access to energy. For instance, while approximately 600 million people all over the world do not have reliable access to energy,[3] in many places, only the rich minority can afford to find individual solutions to avoid using dirty energy, for example, expensive solar panels.

Mutually reinforcing systemic oppressions also shape the current energy system. Global elites and countries in the Global North benefit from energy-intensive lifestyles, while most of the impacts of the current energy system are felt in the Global South.

The sexual division of labour[4] and environmental racism have led women in the Global South, as well as black people and people of colour, Indigenous groups and rural communities, to be disproportionately impacted by destructive energy sources. Africa is still mostly rural, although rapid urbanisation exists. In these rural areas, the majority are peasant women farmers. This means women are fundamentally tied to the lands. Because of gender rules, we tend to be the ones who cook, farm, fetch water, gather wood, tend to the sick... it is these sorts of roles and connections to the land that make us the stewards of the land.

"It is important to frame the discourse on Just Transition around developmentalism because many policies and programmes are packaged as anti-poverty initiatives, rather than capitalist ventures. Once framed this way, it becomes difficult to argue with them; this is why many movements against large-scale projects are branded as anti-development. You could say that developmentalism is like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Similarly, sustainable development is a handmaiden to neoliberal fundamentalism."

Maya Quirino, LRC / Friends of the Earth Philippines.

"When resources and land are grabbed by big dirty corporations, impacts are most deeply felt by women, and what makes it worse is that we have this very close connection to land; our role is the connection to the land, but we do not own the land. We tend not to own the land because of patriarchy, and it is unfortunately men – who do not work on the land – who own the lands."

Trusha Reddy, WoMin Africa.

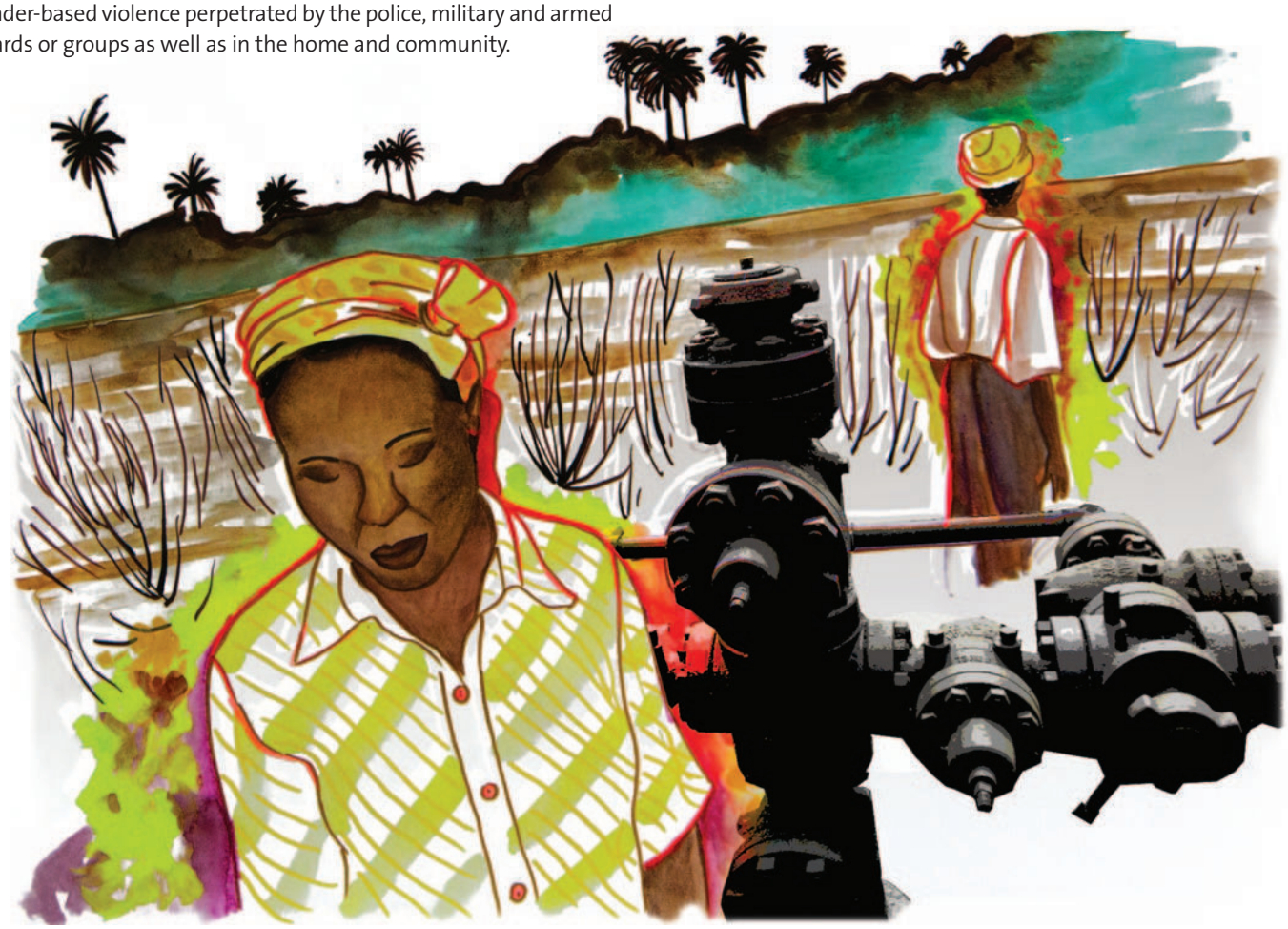
The legacy of toxic and radioactive contamination left by fossil fuel and uranium development in some areas of (our) Indigenous lands remains to this day. Toxic facilities, mines, and electrical generation facilities, including coal-fired power plants, nuclear power, and mega-hydro dams, pulp, and paper mills, and toxic smelters, have had devastating health, social, environmental, ecological and cultural impacts on Indigenous peoples and lands, at all stages of the energy cycle. For example toxic and heavy metal contamination has caused cancer from radioactive mining waste and processing and many people suffer from respiratory illness caused by air emissions from coal-fired power plants, oil refinery, oil and gas wells, and now hydraulic fracturing.[5]

The fossil fuel economy has led to multiple negative impacts on peasants, fisherfolk, rural communities and women: loss of land, water, and livelihoods; pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss; destruction of local economies and introduction of export-oriented economies; (gender-specific) health damage. These impacts are accompanied by the exploitation of women's work and bodies, and gender-based violence perpetrated by the police, military and armed guards or groups as well as in the home and community.

"In Mozambique, coal companies opened up coal mines. There was a relocation of families, and the women were more impacted: they feed the family, they plant food. Especially rural women, because that is where fossil fuel exploration leads to a loss of livelihood, land, water.

In the province of Tete, the relocation houses were terrible, people couldn't live well because of the hot weather. There was no transportation to the market, the land was far away – women had to walk, even sleep far away, to have access to their fields. Small kids, daughters, stopped going to school because of the risks since there was no transportation, and they suffered harassment on the way to school. Finally, the husbands go to mines and have other families, leaving the women alone with the kids. And the government supports it."

Anabela Lemos, Justiça Ambiental JA! / Friends of the Earth Mozambique.



People in the Global South are also more likely to be affected by energy poverty, which is the absence of sufficient energy to ensure people's well-being and dignity. In this sense, there is a clear division between those who benefit the most and those who pay the biggest price for the world's current energy model. Too often the presence of natural resources leads to a resource curse – resulting in poverty (including energy poverty), loss of land, militarisation, violence and corruption.

"Oil was not a blessing. Oil revenue never returned to people as promised. The land was taken from them without compensation. No compensation has been paid. Even though it is women who are farming the land, they don't have access to compensation. In the town hall, women don't enter. They have no voice in the community – men are speaking for them. This is challenging. Women are part of the community and have to speak out! Let men know they are there.

Women are suffering from miscarriage, skin problems. Drinking water is polluted with benzene. Sicknesses that happen in the community are not common in Nigeria... but they are getting worse day-by-day. One woman lost her two children because of the pollution. She lives close to the extraction place.

No access to land, no access to anything in the community. Women in the Niger Delta depend on the environment, and when you take the environment from women there is nothing left! The mangrove is polluted. Seafood is gone, they used to depend on that. But now there is nothing."

Keziah Okpojo, ERA / Friends of the Earth Nigeria.

Race, gender, class, and heteronormativity[6] also have a relevant historical and continued role in structuring our societies[7] and shaping access to the benefits of this ultimately undemocratic energy system. That is, the closer one is to the white, upper class, heterosexual and nuclear family in the Global North, the less likely they are to suffer from energy poverty and from the consequences of the interconnected energy and climate crisis.

"The fossils industry, some studies argue, is structurally violent. Firstly, the impact on the environment is devastating. Levelling forests, digging deep into the earth – these are physically violent acts that disfigure, even effectively kill, landscapes. But in poorer nations, and in indigenous lands, in particular, large scale "development" projects, which includes extractivist regimes like coal and metallic minerals mining, are such bloody enterprises. They divide communities, and environmental defenders are intimidated, harassed, or killed. The experience of violence of Indigenous Peoples and poor rural communities, including women, is well known. This subjects Indigenous peoples to invasive projects that last for decades. Can you imagine living in the midst of that thing that you haven't signed off on and which contradicts everything you believe in? That is painful."

Maya Quirino, LRC / Friends of the Earth Philippines.

NEITHER JUST, NOR FEMINIST: FALSE SOLUTIONS

03

Just as women know from personal and collective experience of the injustices of the fossil energy system, transitioning to a renewable energy (RE) system does not automatically lead to a just transition. Left unaddressed, the historic and systemic injustices on which the fossil system relies will repeat themselves as renewable energy expands.

Women activists do not question that the climate crisis urges us to make a swift transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. But, this transition can only provide a lasting and just solution if it addresses the many injustices that have resulted from the current climate crisis. We cannot afford to make the same mistakes again.

However, as the ongoing systemic crises unfold, the narratives about sustainability and transitions are being increasingly appropriated by multiple sectors. Not all of them are committed to socio-environmental justice, nor the dismantling of systemic oppressions.

Indeed, their actions can end up deepening systemic injustices embedded in the current energy system and ultimately turn energy transition into business as usual. We call them unjust transitions, to emphasise how this can contribute to worsening socio-environmental injustice. In this section we will consider how these unjust transitions reinforce existing problems.

Of special concern are initiatives tainted by **greenwashing** and **purplewashing**.[8] These terms are used when states and corporations paint their actions as environmentalist and feminist, while continuing to place profits above the lives of the majority of the people, advancing environmental destruction and reinforcing patriarchy. Both greenwashing and purplewashing are already found in the field of the energy transition.

EXTRACTIVISM AND GREENWASHING: BUSINESS AS USUAL

Some states have been mobilising the narrative of energy transition and legitimate public concern about the environment to justify new investments and policy shifts.

"The Department of Energy of the Philippines has recently [and unexpectedly] announced that it will be imposing a moratorium on coal. The pandemic has brought into sharp relief the unreliability and inflexibility of coal. Exxon Mobil's stocks plunged amid the pandemic, for example... Globally, we cannot, of course, discount the also genuine desire to pursue ecological solutions, especially with many governments and even corporations waking up to the climate crisis. The paradigm shift (from fossil fuels use to renewables) has been considerable, considering how recent climate change has become part of the public discourse. However, the shift to renewables must also not perpetuate neoliberal fundamentalism. Renewables might just end up merely powering the same exploitative and destructive arrangements that fossil fuels support. The shift to renewables must be in parallel to a dramatic shift to pathways that don't value nature or exploit labor purely for profit. China has very shrewdly invested in coal as well as in renewables. Under its Belt and Road Initiative it is lending money to poorer nations in Asia for renewable projects which involve Chinese contractors leading or helping to carry out approved projects... in response to a saturated domestic (Chinese) market. Again, this illustrates that the shift to renewables carries within it the risk for renewables to perpetuate the same predatory arrangements."

Maya Quirino, LRC / Friends of the Earth Philippines.

The massive switch from fossil to renewable energy and storage requires raw materials and minerals, extracted from the earth through mining. Mining is a sector known for its environmental damage and many human rights abuses. The mining sector fuels tax evasion, corruption and violent conflict, particularly in the Global South. Forced labour and slavery (including child exploitation), as well as gender-based violence (such as forced prostitution and sexual violence), are often linked to mining sites, which can turn into conflict zones as environmental and human rights defenders, often women, expose the injustices of the mining sector and are often targeted by company and governmental forces that do not wish to see their interests undermined.

Many of the renewable energy resources are located on indigenous territories and ecosensitive areas. Their extraction uses massive amounts of energy, water, materials and land. Mining-related chemicals severely pollute land, air and water, leaving behind tremendous damage to the environment and to species´ and people´s health. On a human level, current mining practices often mean that communities are faced with land grabbing, loss of income and loss of access to their territories.

It is these sites where neocolonial, ecological and gender injustices interlink. The energy transition, which so many people hope will bring an end to decades of fossil injustice, could therefore easily lead us on another race to the bottom. Already some of the world's major economic powers are deeply concerned about supply risks and how this will affect their strategic autonomy. Some of the most vital metals for transition to renewable energy are only available in a limited number of countries – most of them already economically dependent on resource extraction. This includes countries that do not uphold human rights or where the presence of minerals has fostered widespread corruption and violent conflict.

Without North-South equity and gender justice firmly integrated in the transition, rich countries will once again impose perpetual "development" and poverty status to the rest of the world, despite the many resources these areas may hold. Women will once more bear the brunt of the crises – dispossessed from access to land and water, locked into lives without access to education, decent labour, property rights, sexual and reproductive rights or proper healthcare.

Several women activists shared examples of how "clean" energy is being appropriated to sustain yet another wave of dispossessions. It is already the case in North Africa, where solar plants in Tunisia (TuNur Solar Project) and Morocco (Ouarzazate Solar Plant) are examples of energy colonialism and the so-called greengrabbing.[9] In the case of Ouarzazate, the project was:

"Installed on the land of Amazigh agro-pastoralist communities without their approval and consent. Second, this mega-project is controlled by private interests and has been financed through US$9 billion worth of debt."

Hamza Hamouchene, Algeria Solidarity Campaign.

"These solar projects are entirely about providing energy for the Global North and not about providing energy access for the Global South. It is essentially a project still operating under old extractivist and colonial ideas of energy, even if the project is 'renewable'. Also, the issue is about the energy system. If huge land grabs take place for solar energy and dispossess local communities, this is not justice. If we don't question, what is the energy for, this is not justice. As we say in Portuguese, "energia para que e para quem". We need to question what the energy is used for, not just how it is produced."

Dipti Bhatnagar and Sara Shaw, Friends of the Earth International.

Corporations are also greenwashing their projects and investments. Transnationals have a long history of investing resources to deflect the social and environmental damage they cause from their perpetual search for maximising profits.[10]

Attempts to wash away corporate action from corporate harm have taken varied formats throughout history. Some well-known examples are initiatives of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), in which capitalist market problems are claimed to be solvable by capitalist market remedies.[11]

For corporations in the dirty energy sector this can include financing theatre companies,[12] education projects,[13] or even projects claiming concern over climate change.[14] The list is long and, for those committed to systemic change, it speaks to the need to understand how the radical anti-capitalist agenda of struggles is being appropriated and commodified.

Greenwashing is being used by dirty energy companies in at least two ways. First, as outlined above, by investments in so-called "environmental sustainability projects" at the local level.[15] These investments try to build an image of dirty energy corporations as being environmentally responsible. Secondly, they also promote a green economy that does not fundamentally challenge the systemic oppressions that are at the core of the fossil economy, and are perpetuating harm to communities and workers.

"Green jobs and green technologies are leading to the appropriation of our proposals and corporate capture! They talk about green jobs as a solution for the energy crisis, but without talking about the forms of production. They use the existing concerns on the part of the workers, but they maintain the production model that we are criticising from our point of view. We need to transform the model: green jobs and purple solutions are not enough!"

Lyda Fernanda Forero, Centro Sindical de las Américas.

A particularly dangerous partnership is that of greenwashed energy transition and the digital economy.

"In the Netherlands, huge renewable energy parks (wind parks) are being built, often near living areas, generating an enormous amount of renewable energy. But this does not mean that this energy is automatically generated for the people living nearby, nor Dutch citizens in general. More and more we hear that the renewable energy goes to big data companies, who increasingly come to the Netherlands as they use these parks for energy to store their data, under a 'green banner of using renewable energy'."

Isabelle Geuskens, Milieudefensie, Friends of the Earth Netherlands.

All these examples point to the fact that corporations are trying to make sure that they will be the ones setting the tone for what the energy transition looks like – more exploitation of workers in corporate-driven transitions.

"The cleaner the energy, the dirtier the jobs. We see different ways to continue to advance and deepen the same model. How do we move towards a vision of transition that is based on the sustainability of life, that puts decent work at the centre?"

Lyda Fernanda Forero, Centro Sindical de las Américas.

States and corporations use greenwashing and appropriate the transition narrative to serve their market and geopolitical interests. Additionally, they rely on technical solutions that are false solutions (eg, carbon storage) which turns the climate change crisis and the much-needed energy transition into more of a technically-framed issue, instead of the system change that is required to address system failure.

False solutions that claim to address the climate crisis, such as carbon capture and storage (CCS), Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), genetically modified organisms, carbon trading, net zero and offsetting can have terrible impacts on local communities. In addition to failing to address the climate crisis and delaying the implementation of real solutions, the use of these false solutions frequently leads to Human Rights' and environmental rights' violations. For instance, land grabs associated with offsetting projects tied to REDD, plantations, and agrofuels are linked to such violations in many countries. This particularly impacts Indigenous Peoples, and often disproportionately affects women.[16]

"Gas cannot be a transition fuel. There is just no atmospheric space for that. It means resigning millions to climate disaster already. Here in Mozambique, we are fighting against gas exploitation, where Total, ENI, and the other usual suspects are involved, who are driving communities into the ground and also contributing to climate catastrophe. We need a different energy system."

Dipti Bhatnagar, Friends of the Earth International.

PURPLEWASHING AND PATRIARCHAL CAPTURE: ADD WOMEN, NOT FEMINISM

The technical discourse about energy transition also holds racial, gender, and class bias.

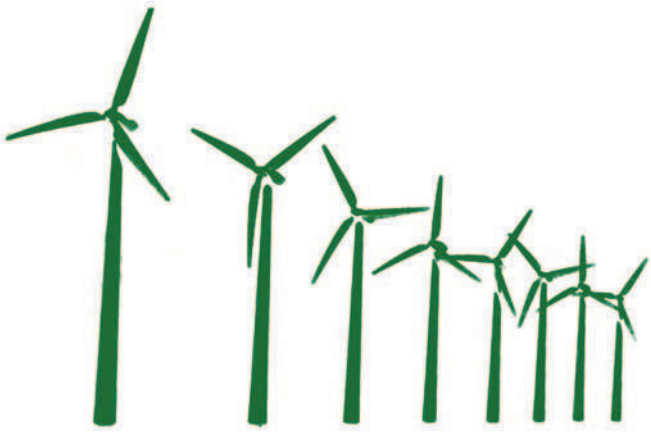
"Mostly white, upper class men are then coming with the techno solutions to solve climate change and achieve the energy transition, solutions that fit current paradigms of patriarchal control over nature... ignoring the voices of groups facing the impacts of the extractivist and climate crisis and who are pointing to the systemic oppressions driving it that need addressing."

Isabelle Geuskens, Milieudefensie / Friends of the Earth Netherlands.

Unfortunately, technocratic views on energy transition are very common among environmental NGOs, which can lead to a problematic approach to feminism and its connection to the energy transition.

"The hegemonic discourse about energy transition focuses on the energy generated outside the bodies (exosomatic), from the so-called "natural resources", thus making invisible the energy generated by the bodies themselves (endosomatic). In this way, care work, which is an essential energy source for the maintenance of the current energy model – and of life as a whole – is completely invisible, thus constituting feminised bodies as other unlimited energy resources."

Cristina Alonso Saavedra, Friends of the Earth Spain.



Far too often in existing technical discourse about energy transition, the sexual division of labour remains unchallenged. Women are not perceived as participants of energy transition initiatives. They do not receive training or acquire appropriate skills to move beyond socially constructed gender roles. Additionally, the energy transition is perceived as a problem that belongs to the field of economic production, and the connection of this sphere with that of the sustainability of life remains hidden.

Official and corporate discourses about energy transition often frame it as yet another sphere of profit-making. When it comes to job creation, it is already clear that the so-called "green jobs" are far from decent, and that care work is not considered as a relevant element in energy transition debates. It is also clear that women will not benefit from investments in a market-led energy transition. A market-oriented energy transition is centred on profit, not on the well-being of most of the people.

Furthermore, when women do participate, what we see overall is a lack of democracy and horizontality. In some cases, women are approached as beneficiaries of energy transition projects, but they are hardly ever perceived as political subjects. And even when women may constitute the majority of the participants of a given energy transition initiative, and even though they are among the most impacted by the climate crisis, the political discourse and decision-making remains in the hands of a few men. This reinforces the same patriarchal structures that sustain politics and decision-making in the framework of the fossil economy.

Additionally, the "gender and development" focus is still predominant, meaning that women's participation as aid-receivers is perceived as being enough. This ultimately reveals the harmful potential of an energy transition that is neither just, nor emancipatory. While it is important to acknowledge the centrality of women's participation in energy transition projects, it is clear that merely adding women does not automatically translate into a feminist project.

The current political and economic system has a long historical record of exploitation and oppression of women, so it is only by challenging the roots of injustices that we will really push forward a Just Energy Transition. Without feminism, we risk creating an energy transition that replicates existing models of gendered exploitation and reinforces patriarchy.

In this sense, grassroots, anti-capitalist, Indigenous, anti-racist and feminist movements must lead the way towards a just and feminist energy transition, disputing practices, and narratives against mainstream energy transition. This can be challenging due to the structural nature of patriarchy and all systems of oppression, and because some states and dirty energy corporations are finding ways to appropriate feminism.

The European Commission and European Parliament, for instance, have been promoting events[17] and commissioning research to include gender equality in energy transition, focusing the discussion on creating more jobs and increasing productivity. As they put it, "gender equality brings more jobs and higher productivity – a potential that needs to be realised as we embrace the green energy transition and the economic recovery following the Covid-19 crisis." [18]

Hidden from such a narrative is the uneven distribution of benefits and impacts even within Europe – as the revival of extractivism in the region already shows. Additionally, the emphasis on an economic recovery and production contradicts what feminists all over the world have been claiming: the need to place life, and the care for life, at the centre of recovery efforts.

Purplewashing is a term used to identify the multiple ways in which corporations mobilise gender perspectives to legitimise their actions and mask their exploitative practices and human rights violations towards women, their territories and communities.

In the dirty energy sector, these corporations may present themselves as promoters of gender equality, investing in programmes supporting women-led start-ups,[19] promoting women in technology,[20] backing education initiatives for girls,[21] and even celebrations of Women's Day.[22] At the same time these transnational corporations do not mention the gender impacts of their actions outside European borders and how their activities reinforce the sexual division of labour and environmental racism, or the historical abuse of Indigenous bodies and territories.

Ultimately, what corporate and neoliberal appropriation of feminism does is to divide and pit women against one another. On the one hand, we find those who deserve to benefit from the privileges of the unjust energy system and, on the other, those who struggle to survive, despite exclusion and the system's negative impacts.

In addition, as these examples show, there is a dangerous corporate-driven commodification of struggles, where social movements' agendas are appropriated and used as yet another sphere of profit-making, thus erasing feminism´s radicality and anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-patriarchal analysis and action.

Finally, when it comes to patriarchal stereotypes, there is a disturbing similarity between the discourses of some environmentalists and that of corporations and states. Both are based on technocratic views that reduce energy transition to a set of technical fixes. Both place the protagonist of energy transition far away from grassroots women. Under these terms, the transition will be led either by the capitalist market and their ultimate agent, the corporations, or the white urban male trained in energy science.

Neither greenwashing nor purplewashing challenge the broader framework of systemic oppressions to which the current energy model is intrinsically connected. As people and movements committed to systemic change, it is important to say no to these false solutions.

"The women affected are the main victims of the impacts of large energy projects: we do not participate in compensation, nor in planning meetings. The women who have the strongest link to the land are excluded. The greatest participation is generally by men. We have created the Arpilleras (patchwork history) project, showing what happens when the dams arrive: places of prostitution are opened along with the construction sites of the hydroelectric dams, and the number of unwanted pregnancies increases. The companies kill political leaders. We are also experiencing strong criminalisation of movements, and wondering how to guarantee the safety of women leaders, so that they can be in the struggle and be heard, in safety. Women, water and energy are not merchandise."

Aline Ruas, Movimento de Afectados por Represas and Movimento Atingidos e Atingidos por Barragens.

FEMINIST JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

04

In opposition to the above-mentioned takes on energy transition, feminists all over the world are advancing practices, building narratives, and constructing a new vision that place the sustainability of life at the centre of the much-needed systemic changes. These provide many elements and values to build an image of what a feminist and Just Energy Transition looks like.

Feminist contributions to a Just Energy Transition can be organised by two interconnected threads, that speak to legacies of anti-systemic actions and reflections. The first covers the economy and politics. The second is that of labour and nature. Feminist legacies of challenging mainstream economy and politics, as well as in promoting alternatives to them, invite us to ask the following question: in which types of feminist economies and politics is a feminist and just energy transition grounded?

This question brings up other sets of questions: how, what, and for whom do we currently produce and reproduce in our societies? And how, what, and for whom do we want to produce and reproduce in the framework of a Just Energy Transition?

The answer to these questions requires acknowledging the colonial, imperialist, racist, patriarchal, heteronormative and capitalist character of the current energy system, that structures and organises societies to ensure profit-accumulation for a few.

"A feminist just transition has many facets. In the main, a feminist just transition confronts Power. It is a critique of any hierarchical system or action that privileges certain classes, identities, or experiences over others. A feminist critique, in addition to reviewing women's issues, contests the very underlying productivist logic of domination behind an "imperial mode of living" (IML).[23] A feminist transition must aspire to transform the status and condition of women. A just transition that serves to perpetuate the oppression, discrimination, and subordination of women is incomplete, at best, and defective, at worst."

Maya Quirino, LRC / Friends of the Earth Philippines.

It also requires rethinking and redesigning social organisation in order to ensure the conditions necessary to sustain life for the majority of the people.

"And that means thinking about the energy system as part of thinking about social organisation by putting reproduction, care, and the struggle against the sexual division of labour at the centre. It is from this feminist, class, anti-racist and anti-colonialist perspective that we have to think about the energy system as a whole, and not only in terms of the energy matrix and sources. Of course, it is fundamental to change dependence on fossil fuels and coal. This has to be done by decolonising the energy system."

Karin Nansen, Friends of the Earth International.

Taken together, this emphasises the importance of challenging and changing the current economic and political systems.

"Work is fundamental and reproductive and care work is essential! We need a transition from an extractivist economy to an environmentally sustainable economy. We are talking not only about energy sources, but also about power, about the uses of energy: for what and for whom, and who owns it? It is a perspective of the democratisation of energy, which must have as its horizon the promotion and expansion of decent work.

It is also fundamental to put an end to energy poverty, as in our region and continent there is environmental racism and energy poverty that must be tackled through the democratisation of energy. We also need a vision of justice. And here we have some principles: centrality of productive and reproductive work; decent work and human rights in general and labour rights in particular; decommodification and depatriarchalisation of energy; free and universal access to public services; participation of women workers in energy justice.

We want an end to asymmetries between countries; we want democratisation of access to land and agrarian reform; democratisation of technology ownership and popular control of technology. The challenge of technology – access, ownership and control – is an essential part of the transition. We need to ensure decommodification and decommodification of the energy matrix."

Lyda Fernanda Forero, Central Sindical de las Américas.

"At the heart of just transition is a deep democracy in which people have control over the decisions that affect their daily lives. A Just Energy Transition is the set of unifying principles, processes and practices based on local experiences of building political power to move from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. And it is about racial and ethnic justice in the United States and in places around the world damaged by US policy."

Kitzia Esteva, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance.

"Feminist and Just Energy Transition should be people-centred, not profit-centred; people-owned (so public ownership, energy democracy), not neoliberal private market-driven. It should include degrowth, so we can live in balance with what the Earth provides in a way that all can benefit, and not some overexploiting at the expense of many and planet – as the green growth myth is creating the same trap we currently find ourselves in."

Isabelle Geuskens, Milieudefensie / Friends of the Earth Netherlands.

Questions about production and reproduction also invite reflections about power: who has the power to decide how production and reproduction are organised? Why do they have the power, how do they use it and what do they do with it?

These questions reveal how a feminist and Just Energy Transition is ultimately connected to grassroots political organisation and collective, horizontal, democratic political processes. Sharing resources, decentralising power structures, and leaving fossil fuels in the ground are seen as part of the same process. Disputing and reclaiming the role of the state as the field in which redistribution is made, and the access to the public is ensured also plays a key role.

"The Just Energy Transition (JET) is a popular political project that requires more and more organisation, that requires and allows us to regain control of the energy system: in public hands, in the hands of the state, of the municipalities and of the communities. And that is a way of building popular power. Together with the affirmation of collective management of biodiversity and affirmation of food sovereignty."

Karin Nansen, Friends of the Earth International.

"Just Energy Transition should be inclusive: energy access for all; decision-making power for all. Indigenous peoples, women, and people from the South are actively shaping and providing the alternative Just Energy Transition visions as we speak, as they have lived the costs of the current model for so long and know from experience what needs changing. But they are ignored and sidelined on the global renewable energy stage. They need to be central to the solution. We do not need a transition that is shaped by those in the driver seat of the current crisis (the male, white, higher educated, techno-fixers, and market thinkers). So just and feminist energy transition is not based on technofixes that have no track record or that outsource damage and costs to others, including next generations. Finally, there should be no renewable energy model that speaks of green transition here in Europe, based on a domestic interpretation of the Paris Agreement, while continuing to stimulate fossil dependence elsewhere through foreign policies and non-regulation of companies. We need binding regulations and due diligence."

Isabelle Geuskens, Milieudefensie / Friends of the Earth Netherlands.

"Inserting a feminist and Just Energy Transition in the framework of a broader process of alliance building and promotion of dialogue among allied movements is key to ensuring that a feminist Just Energy Transition will be part of a full political project of systemic change."

Nalu Faria, World March of Women Americas.

The political and practical relationship between Just Energy Transition and food sovereignty is a key example in this regard. Grassroots movements such as La Via Campesina and World March of Women identify agroecology as a feminist, anti-racist and anti-colonial political path, grounded in ancestral knowledge and culture, to achieve food sovereignty. The initiatives of agroecological grassroots education advanced by these movements should be perceived as knowledge centres for feminist Just Energy Transition.

This implies also having a very clear, collective refusal of the false solutions and unjust transitions. This refusal is grounded in an anti-capitalist agenda and on a broad understanding that we need to break with this system. Ultimately, only a feminist approach to a Just Energy Transition can counter the corporate capture of the transition agenda.

Discussions about the economy and politics in the framework of a feminist and Just Energy Transition are connected to how labour is organised in our societies and what types of human-nature relations are put forth in the labour processes. The principles of interdependence – acknowledging and valuing the dependence among human beings – and ecodependence – acknowledging human dependency on nature – are very important in this regard[24] as is the acknowledgment of historical processes of dispossession.

"What are the community grassroots solutions implemented, that continue to exist post-colonisation, that are model projects for new ways of existing along with communities and energy? Care and keeping the whole community healthy. For many Indigenous peoples, the role of women in caring for the community has been damaged due to colonisation. But this role is still valid, and we need to reflect on how we can use this valuable role as a way to transit towards sustainable energy, community-owned systems, community sources of food, food security and sovereignty."

Bineshi Albert, Indigenous Environmental Network.

"How, from the perspective of feminist economics, can we radically change the economic system? And from there, change the energy system? It also means disputing territories, against their appropriation, both by the dominant energy system and by the false solutions that transform territories into platforms for the accumulation of capital."

Karin Nansen, Friends of the Earth International.

The challenge ahead of us is to ensure a feminist and ecodependent transition, as opposed to the current commodified way of approaching access to energy and other basic rights.

"The Narmada Bachao Andolan (Movement to Save the River Narmada) in India is an amazing, beautiful peoples' movement which has been working since 1985 to protect the river and stop destructive dams from devastating the ecology and with it millions of lives and livelihoods. The government wanted to build the dam to supply electricity to faraway places, while most of the Indigenous peoples who were going to be displaced by the dam have never had access to electricity themselves.

The motto of the movement is 'struggle and reconstruction'. So as part of the reconstruction work, some villages organised themselves, built alliances with the peoples' science movements in India, and used their own labour to build and maintain small micro-hydro dams in their villages. They had electricity for their own villages without creating any ecological destruction or destroying other human beings. They controlled the decision-making about the energy source and the energy usage. The lesson we can learn is the importance of people-owned, renewable energy options."

Dipti Bhatnagar, Friends of the Earth International.

"Practical examples show people that it is possible to do things differently, that a better world is possible. When we talk about renewable energy, we do not talk about hydroelectric dams, because they bring about the impoverishment of the people. A fair transition demands popular participation in the debate on what that fair transition is. The people are currently excluded from the debate. In Cuba, children participate in the debate. In MAB, we also debate with children. This is a process of participation. We ask: how much energy, oil exploration, mining and who is it for? When we debate sovereignty, we can ask the question: what is energy for?"

Aline Ruas, MAB and MAR.

"We are empowering women as sustainable energy leaders. Women are more vulnerable to energy scarcity and we need to focus on them. Why is clean energy needed in Palestine? We depend on Israel's supply of energy, and they are occupying our land. Israel depends on coal energy. So when we started thinking about increasing our energy, we thought it is important to be independent of Israeli energy. In the West Bank, Jordan valley, there are the most vulnerable communities, under full Israeli control because it is in the sea area. There is a lot of Israeli pressure in these communities because they want to force them to leave their land. Israel stops Palestine organisations providing services there, but we managed to provide solar panels for them because there is no energy infrastructure.

In Gaza, people cannot remember the last time they had 24-hours of electricity. They live under siege, so there are only three to four hours of daily energy. Rich people with money can have energy during the night, but the majority of people cannot. Gaza has lived in the darkness for 14 years. So, we placed solar energy projects in Gaza and West Bank and we targeted household use. Now women-led farms and centres have 100% clean energy sources. They produce organic strawberries, cheese, milk, food... and life is much easier, now there is time to do other things – before the women did not have time. This project saves time and resources."

Abeer Butmeh, Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON) / Friends of the Earth Palestine

Any energy transition needs to be integrated into a broader set of political agenda for systemic change, where peoples' power and grassroots feminist organising is key.

"A regional vision of transition requires respect for the rights of local communities, the right to prior consultation. It is not just a technological issue. We can recognise energy as a common good. In Latin America, a mercantile logic persists in renewables. We have to fight against the commodification of energy. There will be a transition, the question is how it will be."

Natalia Salvático, Tierra Nativa / Friends of the Earth Argentina.

Women affected are defenders of life, because we fight against this system which is a system of death, because in the current system death is a common outcome. We debate the price of electricity: it is a robbery and takes away people's food, which mainly affects us, women, who are at home, who take care of the household economy. We are blamed for using electrical appliances because energy is expensive. We need a popular feminism, built by working women, who want to build another society that we call socialism, and others call the good life."

Aline Ruas, MAB and MAR.

IF THE TRANSITION IS NOT GRASSROOTS AND FEMINIST, IT WILL NOT BE JUST.

COVID-19: CHALLENGES

05

The ongoing pandemic has made evident the interdependence between human beings and the ecodependence of humans on nature and non-human life.[25]

"The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us all of a stark truth: that capitalism is undermining core human needs and pushing ecological and social systems to the brink of collapse. The need to restore the relationship between our societies and nature has never felt more urgent. We must build a just recovery on environmental, social, gender, racial, economic, and people-centred justice."

Dipti Bhatnagar, Friends of the Earth International.

Yet when looking at the responses to Covid-19 we see that, once again, the so-called productive economy is prioritised over care, community, and nature. As a consequence, care needs and domestic work have been delegated to the private sphere, to be solved in the framework of the family or through the private market. Either way, this work is disproportionately done by women.

"The response to Covid-19 has been to sacrifice individuals around the planet for the sake of capitalism. There is a convergence taking place: a world in which power is concentrated, wealth is concentrated, the potentiality to receive care is concentrated."

Samantha Castro, Friends of the Earth Australia.

Covid-19 has exposed the magnitude of the care crisis in our societies: a crisis that has developed over centuries through the failure of the patriarchal, racist, capitalist system to care for people, nature, and territories, and its reliance on the work and bodies/territories of women to make up for and fix the damage caused by the capitalist neocolonialist system of exploitation.[26]

While governments and markets fail to respond to the needs of people and the planet, social movements and communities have been organising solidarity networks to make sure that basic needs will be met. These experiences are key to the survival of communities and must be valued as providing relevant content for framing the recovery process.

They also point to the need to create another relationship with care, with women's autonomy, work, bodies, and a new relationship with nature and with living within ecological limits. All over the world, feminists are denouncing that "the normal" is what got us here in the first place, and refusing to go "back to normal".

Instead, as Friends of the Earth International's principles for Just Recovery from the Covid-19 crisis state,[27] the process of recovering should start by abandoning neoliberalism and austerity, as well as putting in place immediate policies and measures founded on justice, which recognise ecological limits.

Governments must respond to the multiple systemic crises — of the pandemic, inequality, climate, food, biodiversity, and care — their interconnections and their root causes, by pursuing a transformative system change agenda.

"Extreme weather events are happening all over the world. We have been choking on the fumes of the California wildfires for months now. The pandemic has exacerbated the need for economic alternatives that respond to the needs of the most impacted communities. There was hyper-exploitation of domestic and migrant workers in the pandemic."

Kitzia Esteva, Grassroots Global Justice Alliance.

This change must be achieved by building and strengthening democracy and guaranteeing the realization of human rights and peoples' rights. Additionally, recovery measures should be built on, and enhance, multilateral cooperation and internationalist solidarity.[28]

06

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a synthesis of ongoing feminist debates about the Just Energy Transition, and also highlights relevant elements for future discussions. We hope it serves as a tool for fruitful discussions, convergences, and collective feminist strategy in the near future.

A just and feminist transition approach means addressing the systemic extractivist injustices that get consolidated and constantly perpetuated in the global market.

A genuine Just Transition means addressing how trade agreements are geared towards liberalising trade in raw materials in the interest of the large energy industries. Instead, there should be regulations for the sake of a fair and inclusive economic global renewable energy system thereby protecting peoples and planet. Because the current system keeps poorer nations with natural energy resources locked in debt traps, while others have control over these resources.

A just and feminist transition also means taking a critical look at how we use energy and the inequalities in who ends up using most of the energy, and at whose expense.

It means addressing unsustainable consumption patterns that exhaust the planet and exploit many of its peoples. The current neoliberal "eternal growth perspective" with its enormous waste generation – often ending up in toxic piles in communities in the Global South – can never achieve a Just Transition. This also links to the rapid increase of digital energy consumption, with the Internet of things and cryptocurrencies catering for the selected few, yet swallowing up massive amounts of energy. Not addressing these inequities and inequalities in relation to energy footprints will further increase the gaps between the haves and have-nots in the world.

Just and feminist transition also means making better use of the metals and minerals that are already circulating in our economies, instead of starting another global race leading to endless extractivism ravaging the globe. It means appreciating the work of waste pickers, many of whom are women. Some materials already can be easily recycled, others could be – if only the priority would be peoples and planet. It would require seriously investing in recycling research and innovation capacity to come up with new, sustainable and safe recycling and design methods. It would require Right to Repair laws, support for repair and reuse and not allowing corporations to calculatingly build products with short lifespans, just because they want to keep selling that product to us over and over again.

All of these ideas are only feasible if we change the productive matrix towards one with decentralised renewable energies based on justice, participation and energy sovereignty, in such a way that communities manage the production of the energy they consume. However, what we see in the mainstream approaches to energy transitions is a long way from that. Instead, corporations promote greenwashing and purplewashing as strategies to mask the lack of systemic change and are making use of energy transition as a business opportunity.

"Energies that sustain the big corporations in their profit projects, in capital accumulation, they do not even think about the sustainability of the communities... [We have to...] place our action in the strength of social movements, shifting from capitalist politics to feminist practices of solidarity, reciprocity between peoples, denouncing economic blockades. The current climate crisis requires the creation of a system that respects life, care and affection. We demand rebellion! In harmony with nature."

Mafalda Galdames, Chile,
World March of Women International Committee.

In this sense, it is important that we build a just and feminist transition that move us away from another race to the bottom but instead moves us towards an inclusive and sustainable road to the top. For example, high standards need to be in place, captured into due diligence obligations requiring renewable energy-related industries to identify, address and remedy their impacts throughout the supply chain and to be held accountable if they don't.

Why should the people without responsibility for creating climate change pay the price for the solution? And why are those groups which are historically responsible for leading us towards multiple systemic crises, including the climate catastrophe, the ones defining the solutions agenda?

The rich industrialised countries have a historical climate and ecological debt towards the developing world and must support them with finance and technology. It must be ensured that these standards are not used against poorer nations to prevent them from controlling their resources and building their own renewable energy capacities, instead they should be supported so that they can strengthen these areas. Only then will we have a Just Energy Transition.

Without a feminist perspective integrated in the system change we are working towards and struggling for, there will be no justice in the Just Energy Transition.

IF THE TRANSITION IS NOT GRASSROOTS AND FEMINIST, IT WILL NOT BE JUST.

IF IT'S NOT FEMINIST, IT'S NOT JUST.

NOVEMBER | 2021

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