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TOWARDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE

NET ZERO TRACKER

Equity & Just Transition Commitments in South Africa

A Multi-Tiered Assessment of Public & Private Approaches

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A paper by:

SouthSouthNorth (SSN) in collaboration with **Net Zero Tracker** (NZT)

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Key Messages

South Africa faces a complex climate challenge, characterised by its heavy reliance on coal, high levels of poverty and economic inequality. These factors offer both significant challenges and opportunities for advancing equitable climate action and achieving a just transition. This paper analyses South Africa's climate commitments at the national, provincial and city levels, focusing on how both the public and private sectors are integrating equity into their just transition commitments, climate mitigation strategies, and target.

Findings

- **Disparities in climate progress** are evident, as climate targets vary across South African provinces, cities, and at the national level, with significant progress in some areas and slower adoption in others.
- **City leadership** is a key driver, with urban centres like Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Pretoria are leading climate action through ambitious net zero targets and comprehensive just transition measures, often surpassing provincial frameworks.
- **One-directional influence of provincial strategies** is observed, as provincial climate strategies exert a positive influence on city-level policies, limiting the potential for integrated action.
- **Wealth as a driver of climate ambition** is evident, with more affluent provinces and cities formulating more ambitious climate strategies and just transition measures, while less affluent regions lag behind.
- **Private sector commitments** to a just transition are inconsistent across sectors, with some sectors exhibiting strong engagement while others lag.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance government coordination** between city, provincial, and national climate strategies through formal intergovernmental committees, leveraging the Climate Change Act (2024) for national oversight and alignment.
2. **Support less affluent regions** by providing targeted financial and technical assistance, including capacity-building and resource mobilisation, as outlined in the Climate Change Act (2024).
3. **Develop sector-specific strategies** to encourage sectors with low engagement in just transition principles to create detailed climate action plans, guided by sector-specific guidelines and reporting mechanisms under the Climate Change Act (2024).
4. **Improve private sector accountability** by incentivising multinational companies to adopt detailed just transition commitments with enhanced corporate reporting and transparency in line with the Climate Change Act (2024).
5. **Ensure transparent and robust targets** by establishing clear climate targets, including separate emissions reduction and removal targets, and integrating scope 3 emissions into overall strategies to enhance accountability.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) holds immense potential for climate leadership due to its abundant natural resources and renewable energy potential. However, the region's economic vulnerabilities and dependence on fossil fuels make the integration of equity into climate commitments essential. Despite some progress—such as the net zero commitments made by a few African countries—the region still faces challenges in ensuring these commitments are equitable. The lack of comprehensive systems to track equity within climate commitments exacerbates this issue, potentially leading to outcomes that could deepen existing inequalities[1].

The Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P), a model operating in South Africa[2] and Senegal which aims to support and accelerate the transition to cleaner energy sources while supporting social and economic equity, reflects SSA's commitment to a cleaner energy future. Still, the SSA private sector's role in achieving just transitions is equally critical. While half of Africa's largest 250 publicly listed companies have set emission targets, there are notable gaps[3]. To align climate action with the continent's development and resilience priorities, there is an urgent need for stronger frameworks that encourage companies to reduce emissions while promoting sustainable growth, ecosystem restoration, and the protection of vulnerable communities.

1.2. South Africa’s Net Zero Landscape

South Africa offers a compelling case for exploring the intersection of economic development and climate commitments in SSA. The country’s energy landscape relies heavily on coal, which presents significant challenges in balancing climate commitments with socio-economic needs. As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, the country has pledged to contribute to global efforts to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. However, this transition must account for South Africa's developmental challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality—issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic[4]. The JET-P launched at COP26 pledges USD$8.5 billion to support the country in reducing its dependence on coal while safeguarding the livelihoods of affected workers and communities[5]. Achieving a net zero economy by 2050 is seen as both a necessity for long-term competitiveness and a step towards building resilience to climate impacts.

Enacted in July 2024, South Africa’s Climate Change Act represents a critical step in aligning climate action with the principles of a just transition. The Act aims to strengthen South Africa’s capacity to reduce emissions and build climate resilience while also mitigating the risk of job losses and creating opportunities in the emerging green economy. This legislative framework provides a vital pathway for equitable and inclusive decarbonisation, laying the foundations for a low-carbon future that benefits all segments of society. Furthermore, as parties to the Paris Agreement are expected to update their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by February 2025, this presents a crucial opportunity for South Africa to strengthen its net zero commitments in the updated NDC. Moreover, by incorporating just transition elements, South Africa can demonstrate its ambition for a fair and inclusive shift toward a low-emissions economy.

1.3. Aim and Objectives

This paper aims to develop and test an expanded equity indicator within the Net Zero Tracker (NZT) framework, starting with South Africa. It comprehensively evaluates 50 key public and private sector entities in South Africa—comprising national and regional governments, cities, and companies—to assess not only their emission reduction commitments but also their just transition strategies. Focusing on South Africa, this research intends to provide insights into how equity can be integrated into climate commitments. Additionally, these findings may help operationalise a net zero framework that aligns with South Africa's Climate Change Act, which underscores the need to "acknowledge international equity and each country's common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), in light of different national circumstances and responsibilities and respective capabilities"[6].

The specific objectives of this paper are to:

1. Develop and test an expanded equity indicator tailored to the South African context.

2. Evaluate the climate commitments of 50 public and private sector entities in South Africa, focusing on their approach to equity and just transitions.

3. Assess the integration of social justice considerations into climate action, identifying best practices and areas for improvement.

4. Provide recommendations for enhancing the inclusion of equity in climate commitments to promote a just transition.

2. Methodology and Data

2.1. Net Zero Tracker in South Africa

Global efforts to address climate change increasingly emphasise net zero commitments, which are necessary for meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement. The NZT, launched in 2021, is the most comprehensive and up-to-date global tool for assessing the climate commitments of more than 4,000 entities, including countries, regions, cities, and large companies[7]. The Tracker assesses commitments by drawing on integrity criteria recommended by the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Expert Group on the NetZero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities (UN Expert Group) and the Race to Zero campaign, led by the UN Climate Change High-Level Champions. This includes an analysis of **targets** (short and long-term), **coverage** of greenhouse gases (GHG), **governance** features including equity, plans and accountability, and the intended use of offsets and carbon dioxide removals (CDR).

To date, the NZT has focused on *references* to the term 'equity' in climate plans without distinguishing between 'international equity' (fair share responsibility for mitigation) and 'domestic equity' (just transition considerations across different groups in society). This language approach did not fully address the crucial dimensions of international equity, climate justice and the just transition, which are vital to ensuring that climate actions are socially and economically inclusive and politically acceptable. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines a just transition as the process of greening the economy[8] to ensure that no one is left behind. A just transition seeks to maximise the social and economic benefits of climate action while effectively managing any associated challenges. It emphasises the importance of social dialogue among all affected groups and upholds fundamental labour rights and principles. This limitation underscored the need for a more comprehensive evaluation framework that integrates social justice considerations into climate commitments.

2.2. Role of Equity Within Climate Commitments

Equity (or fairness) is essential for ensuring that the transition to a low-carbon economy does not exacerbate existing inequalities or create new ones. It involves the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of climate action, with particular attention to vulnerable and marginalised communities. The intended evolution of the NZT to include a more comprehensive assessment of the different dimensions of the just transition would represent significant progress in benchmarking and tracking progress over time. If scaled beyond the South African context, it will offer deeper insights into how global entities are incorporating just transition considerations into net zero and other mitigation commitments, including strategies for social justice, worker retraining, and community engagement.

Incorporating equity considerations into climate commitments can: [9] [10] [11] [12]

- Enhance capacity for setting science-based climate targets to support just transitions.
- Demonstrate the links between climate commitments and managed just energy transitions, with South Africa serving as a test case.
- Facilitate the promotion of just transition policies at higher levels of governance, particularly relevant for sub-national governments and corporations.

This approach reflects the broader understanding that effective climate action should balance environmental objectives with social justice imperatives.

2.3. Methodological Approach

The methodology underpinning this analysis enhances the Net Zero Tracker (NZT) framework by revising its equity indicator to better assess fairness considerations within the mitigation targets and strategies of large national, regional, city and private sector entities, starting with South Africa. By supporting the evolution of the NZT's equity

indicator, this study contributes to developing a more comprehensive global framework for evaluating the fairness of climate commitments and the inclusion of equity considerations.

The scope of this analysis was limited to the largest 50 public and private sector entities situated or operating within South Africa to define and test an expanded 'equity indicator' for the NZT. The NZT is an independent global resource that assesses the scale and quality of net zero pledges across nations, regions, cities, and companies. In partnership with the NZT, we applied this new equity indicator to inform us (SSN) of just transition progress in South Africa while developing the NZT's ability to assess governments and companies on:

1. **'Fair share' responsibility for reducing GHG emissions**, based on current and historical emissions.

2. **Intentions of implementing a just and equitable transition** that supports communities, workers or vulnerable groups under their jurisdictions.

This collaboration will support NZT's long-term objective to scale a complete equity indicator globally to assess the fair share and just transition dimensions of the more than 4,000 entities in its database. For this research, SSN led the assessment of the 50 South African entities (detailed below) within scope, noting when just transition-related terms appeared, as well as analysing their climate targets more broadly.

2.4. Scope and Selection of South Africa-based Entities

We selected thirty-two (32) South Africa-based entities from the existing NZT database, spanning multiple governance levels, including the national government, nine (9) provinces (the principal administrative divisions of South Africa), twelve (12) cities representing key urban centres, and ten (10) of the largest publicly listed companies. We augmented the 32 South African entities in the NZT database with 18 of South Africa's largest companies, including a selection of companies from the Fossil Fuel sector. All data in this paper was collected and analysed as of October 2024, drawing from an in-depth examination of policy documents, press releases, and other sources where organisations outlined their climate commitments. The analytical framework was grounded in NZT database criteria, evaluating key parameters such as target type, intended achievement dates, and emissions scope. Additionally, each source was assessed for its integration of equity principles through the framework of fair share and just transition considerations and associated commitments. It is important to underscore that the findings reflect the data landscape as it stood in October 2024, with the understanding that new data or policy shifts may have occurred thereafter.

2.4.1. Public Sector Entities

These South African public sector entities in the NZT database represent different governance levels within South Africa (**see Table 1**), specifically:

- **National level:** The South African government.

- **Provincial level:** The nine provinces, which are the country's primary administrative divisions.

- **City level:** Twelve of the most significant cities that are critical to implementing net zero commitments at the local level.

Table 1: South African Entities in the Public Sector.

	Country	Regions	Cities
1	South Africa	Western Cape	Cape Town
2		Northern Cape	Durban
3		Kwazulu-Natal	Johannesburg
4		Limpopo	Tshwane (Pretoria)
5		Eastern Cape	Bloemfontein
6		North West	Buffalo City (East London)
7		Free State	The Msunduzi (Pietermaritzburg)
8		Gauteng	Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth)
9		Mpumalanga	Soshanguve
10			Vereeniging
11			West Rand

Source: Author's own tabulation.

2.4.2. Private Sector Entities

In addition to national, regional and city governments, we examine a selection of private sector entities, presented in **Table 2**. We assess the ten largest South Africa-based companies (by revenue) in the Forbes Global 2000[13].

Table 2: South African Entities in the Private Sector.

	Largest Companies	Fossil Fuel Companies	Multinational Companies
1	Sanlam	Eskom Holdings	Amazon
2	Nedbank	Exxaro Resources Ltd	Apple
3	Firstrand	Transnet SOC Ltd	Volkswagen
4	Standard Bank Group	Thungela Resources ITD	Google
5	Naspers	Grinrod Ltd	Toyota
6	ABSA Group	Salungano	Microsoft
7	Old Mutual	African Rainbow Minerals	Ford
8	MTN		BMW Group
9	Sasol		Mercedes Benz
10	Momentum Metropolitan Holdings		Nestlé

Source: Author's own tabulation.

Ten multinational companies (MNCs) were also selected. We chose these global firms, all with significant operations in South Africa, to assess whether their net zero commitments account for, and assist, South Africa's just transition or whether they overlook the country's transition needs. These companies span sectors such as automotive, technology, and food manufacturing, providing an overview of equity and just transition representation among major international brands operating in South Africa.

We also included eight South Africa-based fossil fuel companies, selected due to the high carbon intensity of their business models. Although not a statistically representative sample, these companies were chosen to understand

how industries in the coal value chain are approaching the just transition. In cases where these companies had mitigation targets, the revised equity indicator was used to analyse whether their targets included considerations for a 'fair share' of climate mitigation or plans for just transitions in their targets.

2.4.3. Overview of Climate Mitigation Targets

The climate mitigation targets of the selected entities are diverse, reflecting the varying levels of ambition and commitment across the public and private sectors. As such, the following targets were categorised based on their specific climate targets, including Net Zero, Carbon Neutral, and Carbon Negative. Non-net zero targets included 'Emission reduction' targets and 'Reduction vs. Business as Usual (BAU)'. Further, a distinction was made between entities with no clear targets and those focusing on emissions reductions against Business-As-Usual (BAU) scenarios.

This categorisation allowed for a nuanced understanding of the landscape of climate commitments in South Africa, providing insights into where progress is being made and where gaps exist.

Table 3: Climate Mitigation Targets.

Target Category	Description
Net zero	Residual CO_2 emissions are balanced by an equivalent amount of CO_2 removal.
Carbon neutrality	An entity purchases carbon offset credits to compensate for its own emissions.
Carbon negative	Removal of more carbon from the atmosphere than emitted.
Climate neutral	Achieving a balance between emitted and removed greenhouse gases, including a broader range beyond carbon dioxide, and considering land-use changes and other climate impacts such that the actor's activities result in no net effect on the climate system.
Emissions reduction	Decreasing or limiting the amount of emissions that are released into the atmosphere.
No target	No formal climate mitigation target has been set.
Reduction v. BAU	Reductions relative to Business-As-Usual emissions trajectories.

Source: Author's own tabulation.

This table will serve as the foundation for further analysis in Section 3, where the varying levels of commitment and their potential impact on a just transition will be examined in greater detail.

3. Analysis

This section comprehensively evaluates climate mitigation targets and just transition measures across South Africa's governance levels. It examines national, provincial, and city factors to understand how equity and climate resilience considerations are integrated into policy frameworks. Additionally, it assesses climate mitigation targets and just transition planning among South African companies and MNCs across various sectors, highlighting the landscape of commitments and strategies towards meeting climate mitigation targets and the incorporation of equity considerations within corporate climate policies.

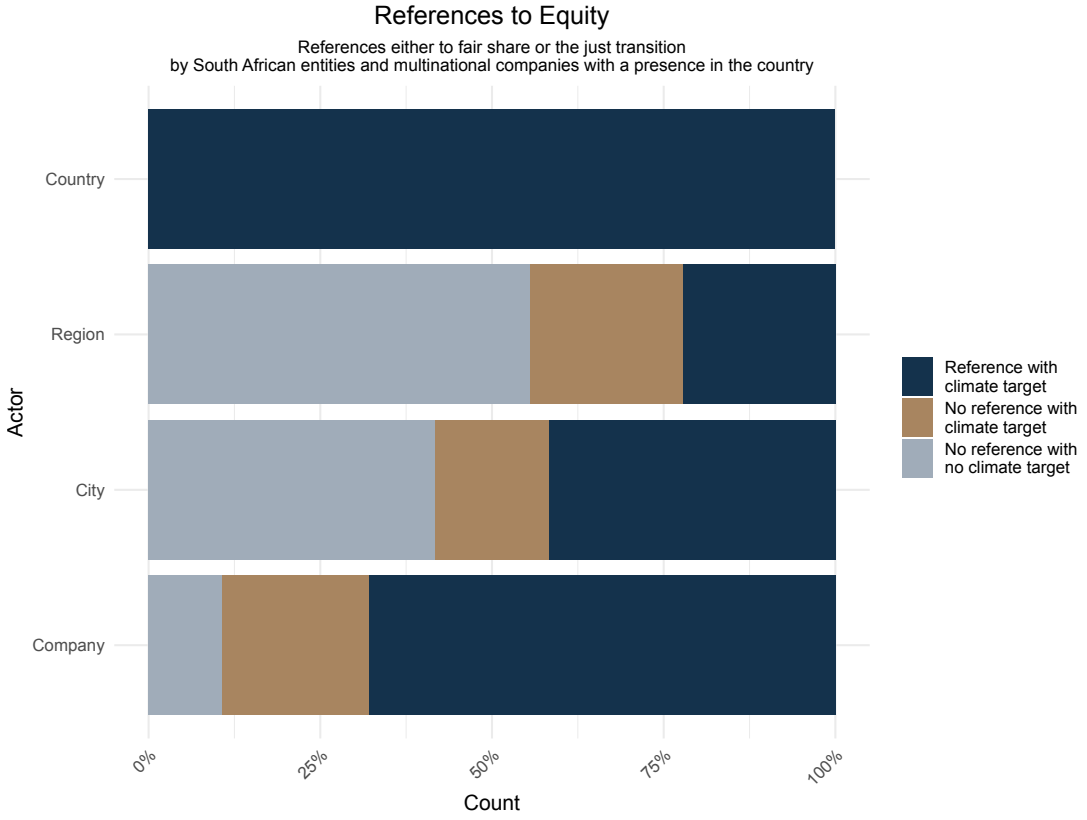

Figure 1: References to either "fair share" or "just transition" in the climate commitments of South African public and private entities, as well as multinational companies with a presence in the country.
Source: Authors' own tabulation.

3.1. Climate Mitigation Targets and Just Transition Measures within the Public Sector

Table 4 presents an overview of climate emission targets and just transition considerations across various governance levels in South Africa. It highlights differences in climate commitments and the extent of equity considerations. The goal is to assess how well these targets reflect mitigation efforts and the socio-economic dimensions of climate policy.

Table 4: Equity and Just Transition Considerations at Different Governance Levels in South Africa.

		Climate Mitigation Target	Just Transition Considerations	Key Highlights/Disparities
National	**South Africa**	Net Zero	Extensive	Emphasises international support, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) frameworks, and fair share considerations. Strong national **just transition** plans.
Provincial Level	**Western Cape**	Net Zero	Extensive	Strong **just transition** policies; focus on vulnerable groups and sectoral involvement.
	KwaZulu-Natal	Net Zero	Minimal	Provincial **Net Zero** commitment but lacks detailed **just transition** considerations.
	Gauteng	Net Zero	None	Wealthiest province; high GDP contribution but minimal **just transition** policies.
	Limpopo	Emissions Reduction	Minimal	Focuses on **emissions reduction** due to reliance on fossil fuels; lacks detailed policies.
	Mpumalanga	No	Minimal	High reliance on coal; minimal **just transition** considerations.
	Free State	No	None	High unemployment; lacks climate policies and **just transition** considerations.
	Northern Cape	No	Minimal	Lacks formal climate targets and **just transition** measures.
	Eastern Cape	No	Minimal	Lacks formal climate targets and **just transition** measures.
	North West	No Minimal	Minimal	Lacks formal climate targets and **just transition** measures.
City-Level	**Johannesburg**	Net Zero	Extensive	Aligns with Gauteng's net zero ambitions; extensive **just transition** measures.
	Tshwane (Pretoria)	Net Zero	Moderate	Aligns with Gauteng's **Net Zero** ambitions; robust workforce, and community support measures.
	Cape Town	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Extensive	Aligns with Western Cape provincial framework; strong **just transition** considerations.
	Durban	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Minimal	Light on **just transition**; focuses more on adaptation strategies.
	Pietermaritzburg	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Minimal	Minimal **just transition** focus.
	Bloemfontein	Emissions Reduction	Minimal	Developing mitigation plans; minimal **just transition** considerations.
	Ekurhuleni	Reduction v BAU	Minimal	Pragmatic approach to emissions management; lacks detailed **just transition** policies.
	Port Elizabeth	No	None	Aligns with lack of targets at the provincial level of the Eastern Cape; no substantial just transition efforts.
	Soshanguve	No	None	**No** low emissions targets or **just transition plans**.
	Vereeniging	No	None	**No** low emissions targets or **just transition plans**.
	West Rand	No	None	**No** low emissions targets or **just transition plans**.

Source: Authors' own tabulation.

3.1.1. National Level Analysis

South Africa aims for net zero national emissions by 2050, as stated in its NDC[14]. This target is a visionary statement awaiting formalisation while the country follows an emissions reduction trajectory that peaks, plateaus, and then declines. South Africa has committed to peak greenhouse gas emissions of 398–510 $MtCO_2e$ by 2025, decreasing to 350–420 $MtCO_2e$ by 2030. However, the net zero target lacks transparency regarding carbon removal and does not fully cover all sectors and gases, with its success contingent on support from developed countries within a fair share

framework. The country's heavy reliance on coal makes it vulnerable to the impacts of decarbonisation, which threatens many communities. South Africa has established a Just Energy Transition framework to address these challenges and ensure "no one is left behind" by supporting affected communities and workers. In 2023, South Africa released the Just Transition Investment Plan[15] and Implementation Plan[16], detailing necessary investments in the electricity grid and green skills development.

3.1.2. Provincial Level Analysis

- **The Western Cape** leads provincial climate action with a comprehensive net zero target integrated into its regional policies, reflecting a strong commitment to both national and international climate goals[17]. While these policies do not delve into the scope of the emissions, they set targets with milestones for 2030, 2040, and 2050, focusing on vulnerable communities and decarbonisation in key sectors such as energy and transport. Its robust just transition measures provide substantial support for communities and workers transitioning from high-carbon to low-carbon sectors, exemplifying its intention to act as a national leader in climate resilience and equity.

- **KwaZulu-Natal** has pledged a net zero target[18] but lacks detailed just transition planning or integration into formal policy[19]. The province has primarily focused on emissions reduction, with limited efforts to support workers and communities affected by decarbonisation. Given the province's industrial economy, enhanced just transition measures are crucial to ensure that vulnerable populations are adequately supported during the transition.

- **Gauteng**, South Africa's economic hub, aims for net zero emissions by 2050. However, its provincial policies are underdeveloped and do not specify the scope of emissions it intends to target[20]. The lack of robust social policies in the climate sphere is concerning, as it could lead to significant socio-economic inequalities during the transition to a low-carbon economy. Just transition measures are similarly lacking, with early-stage efforts in green infrastructure and transport needing further development.

- **Mpumalanga** currently lacks a formal net zero target[21]. Its climate strategy mainly addresses the transition away from coal without a structured long-term goal. The province's early-stage efforts, such as pilot Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP) projects, show promise, but more structured plans are needed to support workers in the province's coal-dependent communities. Just transition measures are in the early stages, and additional initiatives are required to address the socio-economic impacts of the transition.

- **Limpopo** commits to an emissions reduction target, but its climate policies do not elaborate on the scope of emissions it intends to reduce[22]. While national climate goals are acknowledged, specific just transition mechanisms are underdeveloped. The absence of targeted support for vulnerable populations is concerning, given Limpopo's economic vulnerabilities.

- **The Free State** does not have a net zero target, reflecting broader gaps in its climate strategy. This is particularly concerning given its economic vulnerabilities, including high unemployment. The province lacks just transition measures, highlighting a need for structured approaches to manage the socio-economic impacts of climate change.

- **The North West**[23], **Eastern Cape**[24], and **Northern Cape**[25] have not adopted formal climate emission targets, and their just transition measures remain minimal. Facing significant socio-economic challenges, such as high unemployment, it is critical for these province's policies to focus on building resilience and fostering equitable transitions.

3.1.2. City-level Analysis

- **Cape Town's** climate commitments position the city as a leader in climate policy, with a strategy that sets a carbon-neutral(ity) target and the implementation of extensive just transition measures[26]. The city's approach

includes job creation through renewable energy initiatives, community resilience programmes, and equitable access to clean energy. Cape Town's climate commitments act as a model for other South African cities, although it has not included details on the scope of emissions that its target acknowledges, as is seen in most public sector entities in this analysis.

- **Johannesburg** has committed to a net zero target and developed a robust climate action policy plan that integrates just transition principles[27]. This policy is grounded in key principles of just transition, addressing various critical issues such as intersectionality, leadership, pro-poor approaches, resilience, inclusivity and sustainability. While Johannesburg does not detail the scope of emissions included in its target, it differs from Cape Town in that it has included the use of carbon offsets in its policy.

- **Tshwane (Pretoria)** also has a net zero target in policy with moderate support for workers and communities[28]. Similarly to Johannesburg, Tshwane's climate policy includes using carbon offsets to achieve its target. However, specific details about the scope of emissions included in its target and conditions around the use of offsets are lacking. Still, significant transition measures include support for climate-resilient agriculture and green transport, along with exploring public-private partnerships for financing[29].

- **Durban** and **Pietermaritzburg** have set carbon-neutral targets but offer limited just transition integration in their climate policies[30] [31]. These cities focus heavily on adaptation to climate impacts, particularly in vulnerable areas, with less attention to the socio-economic aspects of the transition. Both cities lack detail around the scope of emissions their targets encompass. While there are several similarities between these cities' climate targets, Durban's climate policy is more advanced than Pietermaritzburg. Durban has committed its carbon-neutral target to policy, whereas Pietermaritzburg's policy is still in its discussion phase. Additionally, while both cities have noted that they will use offsets to achieve their targets, Durban stands out as one of the only cities detailing what this could entail. Durban notes its intention to address offsets through Durban's Metropolitan Open Space System (D'MOSS) programme[32], which focuses on reforestation projects. The city is looking to assess the carbon dioxide (CO_2) stored through these initiatives as an option for partially offsetting their remaining emissions[33]. The policy also specifies that Durban intends to explore other opportunities for offsetting CO_2 emissions especially through partnerships with the private sector as the National Carbon Tax gets implemented[34].

- **Bloemfontein**, while acknowledging the National Climate Change Response Plan of South Africa (NCCRP)[35], is in the early stages of discussion of its proposed emissions reduction target efforts, which focus on transport, finance, community services and the use of carbon offsets. The city's lack of substantial transition measures could leave vulnerable populations unsupported as climate policies are implemented.

- **Ekurhuleni**, **Port Elizabeth**[36], **Soshanguve**, **Vereeniging**, and **West Rand**[37] have yet to adopt comprehensive climate targets or just transition measures, indicating a need for increased national support to address the socio-economic impacts of climate action in these regions. Ekurhuleni, however, seems to be making minor progress in climate action through its Reduction vs BAU pledge and its intention to use carbon offsets as part of this effort[36]. Still, details on the coverage of emissions these reduction efforts will entail and specifications on offsets are not given.

3.2. Climate Mitigation Targets and Just Transition Measures within the Private Sector

Table 5 shows the climate mitigation targets and just transition planning among the 10 largest South African companies, revealing a diverse range of approaches and commitments across different sectors. In this section, we outline trends, specific strategies and practices of these companies, highlighting sectoral variances and identifying areas of strength and potential improvement.

3.2.1. Financial Services

The South African financial services sector demonstrates a notable commitment to both climate mitigation targets and just transition principles, with all entities holding climate mitigation targets and leading companies showcasing relatively advanced strategies.

- **Sanlam** has established an emissions reduction target as part of its corporate transition strategy, aiming to minimise emissions rather than pursuing a net zero approach[39]. Its commitment includes partial coverage of scope 3 emissions. It has an ambitious and proactive approach to the just transition, including comprehensive upskilling programmes for green economy preparation and collaborative stakeholder initiatives in their strategy. Its approach aligns closely with global standards like the TCFD, reflecting a mature integration of just transition considerations.

- Similarly, **Momentum** has included an emissions reduction target in its climate strategy. It has self-declared that it has met its target of a reduction of 25% of its scope 1 and 2 emissions compared to a 2014 baseline[40]. It indicates that it has achieved a reduction of 34% across all its emissions (scope 1, scope 2, and scope 3) in 2021 and is looking to set new targets soon. It has also committed to significant just transition considerations, such as focusing on green skills funding and target setting, aligning with TCFD recommendations. However, specific support for communities beyond immediate operations is less detailed.

- **Old Mutual** has pledged to reach net zero emissions across its operations and portfolios by 2050[41]. Its commitment includes partial scope 3 emissions coverage. Its just transition considerations are strong, with an approach that emphasises community investment and employee training, aligning with TCFD recommendations. However, there is limited detail on projects supporting communities beyond local operations.

- **Nedbank** has also adopted a net zero emissions by 2050 target across all emission scopes[42]. It expresses interest in using offsets to meet their target but indicate that it adopts a 'reduce first, then offset' strategy. Nedbank has committed to using high-quality, verified offsets, verified and audited by independent bodies under recognised carbon standards, with a preference for credits that have positive social and natural benefits. It has just transition strategies, such as board-level training on climate change, with measures to support its own workforce in raising awareness and further support for clients' climate transitions.

- **FirstRand**, **Standard Bank Group**[43], and **Absa** have all pledged to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 with full scope 3 coverage. FirstRand expressed its intention to use offsets to help meet its climate targets but gives little detail on the specifics[44]. Similarly, Absa foresees the use of offsetting part of its pathway to meet its climate target[45]. While Absa commits to using only high-quality offsets, there is a lack of clarity on how the quality will be determined. All these companies (FirstRand, Standard Bank and Absa) have some high-quality just transition considerations in their climate strategies, notably: targeted risk management training and client transitions; partnering with clients for climate goals and support for local communities and initiatives; and board-level training on just transition and community support and equity considerations respectively appear in their climate strategies. However, all these companies also have limited information on transition support beyond their operations.

Table 5: South African Companies' Climate Mitigation Targets and Just Transition Support.

Company	Climate Mitigation Target	Just Transition			
		Transition Support for its Own Workforce	Transition Support for Local Communities/ Vulnerable Groups	Transition Support Beyond Operations	Other References to Just Transition
Sanlam	Emissions Reduction	Upskilling programs, employment in renewable sectors	Support for high emitters with collaborative approaches	Not specified	Collaborative approach, focus on equity
Old Mutual	Net Zero	Training and upskilling for employees	Community investment and support for vulnerable groups	Limited details	Integration with TCFD recommendations
Momentum	Emissions Reduction	Green skills funding and target setting	Community support and investments in green projects	Not extensively detailed	Aligns with TCFD recommendations
Nedbank	Net Zero	Raising awareness, investment transitions	General support for clients' climate transitions	Limited details	Board-level training on climate change
FirstRand	Net Zero	Targeted risk management training	Support for client transitions	Not extensively detailed	Focus on internal and external support
Standard Bank	Net Zero	Partnering with clients to support them in reaching their climate transition commitments	Support for local communities and initiatives	Limited details	Collaboration with clients on climate goals
ABSA Group	Net Zero	Board-level training on just transition	Community support and equity considerations	Limited details	Focus on board-level training and support
Sasol	Net Zero	Extensive employee retraining, community investment	Community job creation and economic stimulation	Local and global value chain impacts	Comprehensive, just transition framework
MTN	Net Zero	Support for youth-led climate ventures	Community support and investments	Not specified	Commitment to youth climate ventures
Naspers	Emissions Reduction	General acknowledgment of just transition	Governance framework for climate targets	Limited details	Provide support to all businesses, operations, and investee companies to meet global climate targets

Source: Authors' own tabulation.

3.2.2. Energy and Chemicals

- **Sasol** pledged to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 with partial coverage of its scope 3 emissions[46]. The company raises the possibility of using offsetting to meet its climate targets but only as a last resort measure and commits to using standards that are aligned with the ICVCM and VCMI's recommendations and that have additional social and environmental benefits that are also supportive of a just transition. **Sasol** has also developed an impressive, comprehensive approach to just transition planning. Its extensive framework includes employee retraining, community investments, and job creation initiatives. Its policies address local and global impacts, highlighting a proactive stance in managing socio-economic effects and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

3.2.3. Telecommunications and Technology

The telecommunications and technology sectors exhibit varying levels of commitment to equity.

- Both **MTN**[47] and **Naspers**[48] have committed to net zero targets, highlighting their commitment to decarbonisation.
- **MTN** state that it will cover scope 3 emissions in its net zero target, and while its strategy indicates that there is a possibility it will use offsets to aid its attainment of its targets, there is a lack of clarity on its offsetting strategy and principles.
- **Naspers** stands out for pledging to achieve net zero emissions by the relatively early timeline of 2030, which is unique in the South African context. It has pledged to partially cover scope 3 emissions, but this may be revised to be more ambitious as its target does not yet exist in corporate strategy but stands rather as a pledge. Naspers further indicates that it may use offsets to achieve their target, but little further information has been given in this regard.
- While **MTN** has strategies to support youth-led climate ventures, showing commitment to innovation and sustainability, **Naspers** acknowledges just transition principles in its climate strategy, and its focus on governance frameworks for climate targets indicates awareness. Both plans lack detail on concrete measures and commitments to just transition strategies.

3.3. South African Fossil Fuel Companies

The analysis of just transition planning among South African fossil fuel companies, as detailed in **Table 6**, reveals a diverse range of commitments and approaches across different sectors.

3.3.1. State-owned Enterprises (SOEs)

- **Eskom Holdings** has set a net zero emissions by 2050 target but does not specify emissions scope coverage[49]. Eskom stands out for its comprehensive approach to the just transition[50]. The company has committed to extensive upskilling programmes, career preparation initiatives, and robust community support efforts. Its strategies extend to local economic stimulation and improving access to basic services, reflecting a strong commitment to addressing both local and broader socio-economic impacts. This extensive approach highlights Eskom's proactive stance in integrating just transition principles into its operational and strategic frameworks.
- **Transnet SOC Ltd**. has committed to achieve net zero emissions by 2040, with full scope 3 coverage[51]. However, its approach to equity and the just transition lacks detail regarding support for impacted communities and workforce transition[52]. The company focuses on general adaptation measures and collaboration with private sector partners but lacks detailed strategies for community support. This reflects a more limited engagement with just transition principles compared to Eskom's comprehensive approach.

Table 6: South African Fossil Fuel Companies.

Company	Climate Mitigation Targets	Transition Support for Its Own Workforce	Transition Support for Local Communities/ Vulnerable Groups	Transition Support Beyond Operations	Other References to just transition
Eskom Holdings	Net zero	Extensive upskilling, career preparation	Local economic stimulation and access to basic services	Comprehensive community support	Strong commitment to socio-economic impacts
Transnet SOC Ltd	Net zero	General adaptation measures	Limited specific support for communities	General collaboration with the private sector	Focus on adaptation and emission reductions
Exxaro Resources	Carbon neutral	Skills retention and upskilling	Community investment aligned with climate change response	Limited specific details	Balance between coal resources and low-carbon transition
Thungela Resources	Net zero	Limited details on workforce support	Not explicitly detailed	Limited details	Net zero target by 2050
Salungano	No target	Plans to uplift impacted employees	Provide support to communities	No detailed strategies	Committed to job creation to support the South African economy
Grindrod Ltd	No traget	No specific transition measures	No specific community support	No detailed strategies	Limited engagement with just transition
Sasol	Net zero	Extensive employee retraining, community investment	Community job creation and economic stimulation	Local and global value chain impacts	Comprehensive just transition framework
African Rainbow Minreals	Net zero mining	No articulated transition measures	Community investment and support for resilience building	No detailed strategies	Integration of climate resilience into development programmes and stakeholder engagement for improved collaboration.

Source: Authors' own tabulation.

3.3.2. Mining Companies

- **Exxaro Resources** has set a net zero by 2050 target, which covers scope 1 and 2 emissions, with scope 3 emissions to be included soon[53]. Exxaro expresses interest in the use of offsetting to aid in achieving its net zero goal, particularly through nature-based solution initiatives. However, it does not provide information about conditions for offsetting. Exxaro demonstrates a notable focus on skills retention and upskilling within its just transition strategy[54]. The company aims to balance the need for a low-carbon transition with the retention of existing coal resources. However, the specifics of its community investment and detailed just transition commitments are relatively limited, suggesting a need for more in-depth planning.

- **Thungela Resources ITD** has also set a net zero by 2050 target, with partial scope 3 coverage[55]. Thungela has included offsetting as part of its approach to reach net zero emissions. Still, little detail has been provided on how this will be done or the conditions around the use of offsetting.

- **Salungano** is currently developing a climate change strategy but does not yet have a climate mitigation target[56]. However, the Annual Integrated Report and additional information on its website indicate that Salungano has committed to integrating some just transition principles in its climate approach. The group has strengthened its commitment to responsibly providing a reliable energy source, addressing investor and stakeholder needs while creating jobs to support the South African economy and uplifting impacted employees and communities.

However, specific concrete details as to how it will achieve these commitments are lacking. indicates that Salungano has committed to integrating some just transition principles in its climate approach. The group has strengthened its commitment to providing a reliable energy source responsibly, addressing investor and stakeholder needs while creating jobs to support the South African economy and while uplifting impacted employees and communities. However, specific concrete details as to how it will achieve these commitments are lacking.

- **Sasol**, as noted in **Section 3.2.2. above**, has committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, with partial scope 3 emissions coverage. Furthermore, its approach is marked by its extensive just transition framework, which includes comprehensive retraining programmes, significant community investments and commitment to create job opportunities. Sasol's just transition policies address both local and global impacts and demonstrates a strong commitment to the just transition principles, setting a high standard within the industry.

- **African Rainbow Minerals** (ARM) has set a net zero mining target, where it commits to achieving net zero emissions across scope 1 and 2 emissions by 2050[57]. It is looking to set appropriate scope 3 targets. ARM has expressed interest in using offsets but is still developing its offsetting strategy, and thus, specific details on this approach are lacking. The company's equity and just transition considerations are limited. It offers transition support for host communities within its value chain, including building capacity for climate resilience and adaptation. Still, there is no mention of support for workers or for communities outside its value chain.

3.3.3. Logistics Companies

- **Grindrod Ltd**. does not have a climate mitigation target. Furthermore, the company's approach to the just transition is characterised by a lack of specific transition measures, although it does have an ESG strategy[58]. The company's limited engagement with just transition principles contrasts sharply with the more comprehensive approaches observed in SOEs like Eskom.

3.4. Multinational Companies

Examining climate mitigation targets and just transition planning among multinational companies across various sectors reveals a varied landscape of targets and commitments. This subsection provides an overview of the targets and strategies employed by leading multinational firms with significant operations in South Africa, drawing on the details summarised in **Table 7**. Our analysis was aligned with the findings of the Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2023, a widely recognised and regarded report assessing the transparency and integrity of Multinational corporations' emissions reduction and net zero targets. We borrow from their definitions of transparency and integrity, which they define as the disclosure of information and the quality and credibility of the approach, respectively.

Table 7: Multinational Companies' Climate Mitigation Targets and Just Transition Support.

Company	Climate Mitigation Target	Just Transition Support			
		Transition Support for its Own Workforce	Transition Support for Local Communities/ Vulnerable Groups	Transition Support Beyond Operations	Other References to Just Transition
Microsoft	Carbon Negative	Workforce support, upskilling for green economy	Community engagement and support	Comprehensive global strategy	Strong alignment with just transition goals
Amazon	Net Zero	General ESG initiatives	Limited specific support for communities	Focus on environmental sustainability	Lacks explicit just transition focus
Apple	Carbon Neutral(ity)	General ESG initiatives	Limited specific support for communities	Focus on environmental sustainability	Lacks explicit just transition focus
Google	Net Zero	General ESG initiatives	Limited specific support for communities	Focus on environmental sustainability	Lacks explicit just transition focus
Ford	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Support for the workforce, supply chain, and communities	Community support and investments	Not specified	Comprehensive just transition strategies
Mercedes	Emissions Reduction	Varying degrees of engagement	Limited specific support for communities	Varies by region	General focus on social equity
BMW	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Varying degrees of engagement	Limited specific support for communities	Varies by region	General focus on social equity
Toyota	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Varying degrees of engagement	Limited specific support for communities	Varies by region	General focus on social equity
Volkswagen	Carbon Neutral(ity)	Varying degrees of engagement	Limited specific support for communities	Varies by region	General focus on social equity
Nestlé	Net Zero	Workforce support and local community engagement	Community investment aligned with climate response	Focus on human rights advocacy	Generalised approach, not detailed

Source: Authors' own tabulation.

3.4.1. Technology Sector

The technology sector exhibits diverse approaches to just transition principles:

- **Microsoft** leads as the only entity with a carbon negative by 2050 target across scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, with an intention to use offsets to reach its goal[59]. Its target has moderate levels of overall transparency and moderate integrity. Its offsetting strategies have high levels of transparency but poor integrity. Furthermore, Microsoft has demonstrated a strong commitment to just transition in its climate plan through comprehensive strategies that include workforce support, community engagement, and upskilling initiatives aimed at promoting a green economy.

- **Apple** has set a **carbon-neutral** target that includes all emissions scopes and will be using offsetting to reach this goal. Overall its target is assessed as being moderately transparent with moderate levels of integrity. Its offsetting has moderate transparency and poor integrity[60] whereas its target is moderately transparent and has moderate levels of integrity.

- Both **Amazon**[61] and **Google**[62] have pledged to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 across all emissions scopes, with the use of offsets. However, Amazon's general target and their offsetting plans are of poor transparency and integrity while Google's net zero target and offsetting strategy have poor to moderate levels of transparency and integrity. Although Apple, Amazon and Google have committed to climate mitigation targets and demonstrate a general commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives, their climate strategies lack specific references to just transition principles. These strategies tend to focus more on environmental sustainability rather than addressing the broader socio-economic dimensions essential for a comprehensive, just transition. This indicates a need for these companies to enhance their strategies by incorporating more detailed socio-economic aspects.

3.4.2. Automotive Sector

Engagement with just transition principles in the automotive sector varies:

- **Ford** has committed to a carbon-neutral goal and has expressed interest in the potential use of offsets to achieve carbon neutrality across its operations by 2050. However, little detail is given about their offsetting strategy[63]. Emissions scope coverage was not specified. Regarding equity considerations, this MNC has a strong approach with pledged robust support for its workforce, supply chain, and communities, aligning its strategies with Paris Agreement goals and integrating socio-economic impacts into its climate planning. Emissions scope coverage was not specified. Regarding equity considerations, this MNC has a strong approach with pledged robust support for its workforce, supply chain, and communities, aligning its strategies with Paris Agreement goals and integrating socio-economic impacts into its climate planning.

- **Mercedes** has adopted an emissions reduction goal across all emission scopes as part of its climate strategy, highlighting its preference for an emissions minimisation versus net zero approach. While its approach to just transition is less defined, Mercedes highlights social equity as a general focus[64].

- **BMW** aims for climate neutrality, covering all three emission scopes and beyond (including methane and nitrous oxide). Its offsetting strategy is vague, with little detail provided on its implementation. While BMW addresses social equity in its climate strategy, its engagement with just transition principles is limited[65].

- **Toyota**[66] and **Volkswagen**[67] have both committed to carbon-neutral targets, with partial coverage of scope 3 emissions and intentions to use offsets. However, their offsetting strategies lack clarity. Both companies show varying levels of commitment to just transition principles. Still, like others in the automotive sector, they lack detailed strategies focused on the socio-economic aspects necessary for a truly just transition. Both Toyota and Volkswagen plan to use offsets but there is a lack of clarity on this intention.

3.4.3. Food and Beverage Sector

- **Nestlé** has pledged to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, covering partial scope 3[68]. The CCRM report indicates low levels of transparency and integrity across Nestle's net zero target and offsetting plans[69]. Nestle's climate strategy includes some just transition considerations, particularly concerning workforce support and local communities. However, the company's approach is somewhat generalised, focusing more on human rights advocacy within its supply chain rather than a detailed implementation of just transition principles. This suggests an opportunity for Nestlé to develop more specific strategies.

4. Reflections and Discussion

4.1. Disparities Between City and Provincial Climate Strategies

A notable disparity exists between city and provincial climate strategies in South Africa. This is particularly evident in the ambitious climate mitigation targets adopted by urban centres such as Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Pretoria, which starkly contrast the policies of less developed provinces. Several cities have expressed interest in implementing offsetting strategies despite these being notably absent from provincial frameworks. Among these cities, Durban stands out for providing substantial details regarding the quality and conditions of its offsets, such as the use of the D'MOSS programme and reforestation projects. This reflects a growing engagement among urban areas in the climate policy arena, with Durban taking a proactive role in defining and implementing its offset strategy. However, the ambiguous quality of these offsets raises questions about the city's actual commitment to climate action.

Cape Town's proactive stance, bolstered by its alignment with the Western Cape's comprehensive climate strategy and relative wealth, has facilitated significant investments in renewable energy and community resilience initiatives. In contrast, cities such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg, while setting carbon-neutral targets, often lack robust just transition measures, revealing the socio-economic gaps that require urgent attention.

Johannesburg and Pretoria exemplify urban centres with ambitious climate action plans that align with Gauteng's economic strengths. Yet, the provincial just transition measures remain minimal. Meanwhile, cities in less affluent provinces—such as Bloemfontein, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the Eastern Cape—struggle to implement effective climate strategies due to a lack of robust socio-economic policies. This observation resonates with Omukuti (2022), who emphasises the critical role that wealthier regions play in spearheading climate strategies across Africa[70]. It underscores the pressing need for targeted support to assist less affluent areas that are disproportionately affected by climate change. Thus, national interventions focusing on capacity-building in vulnerable provinces are crucial to bridging the gap between urban climate leadership and provincial inaction.

4.2. Influence of Provincial Targets on City-level Adoption

The analysis reveals a predominantly one-directional influence of provincial climate targets on city-level adoption of climate strategies. The Western Cape serves as a notable example, where the province's comprehensive net zero strategy has significantly shaped Cape Town's ambitious climate policies, enabling alignment with key decarbonisation milestones for 2030, 2040, and 2050. However, this influence appears constrained to more affluent regions. For instance, cities like Durban and Johannesburg do not consistently reflect provincial targets in their climate strategies, indicating that while provincial strategies can guide urban initiatives, they do not uniformly dictate city-level actions—especially when provincial policies are underdeveloped.

Moreover, evidence of provincial targets being influenced by city-level initiatives is scant. Cities such as Johannesburg and Pretoria have taken the lead in establishing net zero targets and initiating just transition measures. Yet, their efforts have not effectively shaped the provincial strategy in Gauteng, which remains underdeveloped in terms of just transition policies. This absence highlights a critical gap necessitating enhanced integration and coordination between provincial and city-level climate strategies. The importance of aligning just transition policies with national development goals and poverty alleviation, as emphasised by Omukuti (2022), further underscores the need for a collaborative approach to achieve cohesive and impactful climate action[71].

4.3. Wealth and Resources as Determinants of Climate Strategy

Wealth and resources are vital determinants of cities' and provinces' capacity to formulate effective climate strategies and just transition measures. Wealthier urban centres such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and Pretoria demonstrate a stronger commitment to net zero targets and comprehensive just transition policies. Their economic resilience, diverse economies, and reduced reliance on high-carbon industries enable them to adopt

proactive measures in response to climate change, integrating detailed plans that encompass both mitigation and adaptation strategies alongside social policies aimed at supporting vulnerable populations.

For instance, Cape Town's carbon-neutral target reflects its alignment with the Western Cape's climate goals and its capacity to invest in renewable energy and community resilience initiatives. Although Johannesburg and Pretoria have made significant progress, their lack of alignment with provincial goals illustrates that financial resources facilitate city-driven climate action. Conversely, cities and provinces with limited financial resources—such as Limpopo and Mpumalanga—face challenges in developing comprehensive climate strategies. Mpumalanga's heavy reliance on coal exemplifies the difficulties of transitioning from fossil fuels without incurring substantial socio-economic costs.

This disparity highlights the necessity for targeted support and equitable resource allocation to empower under-resourced provinces and cities to adopt robust climate strategies. National policies should ensure that financial, technical, and institutional capacities are distributed equitably, particularly in economically vulnerable areas, which is in line with Omukuti's (2022) findings. Such support must align with broader poverty reduction and sustainable development objectives, ensuring that less affluent regions are not left behind in the transition to a low-carbon economy. A more equitable distribution of resources, coupled with capacity-building initiatives, will bridge the divide between affluent cities and under-resourced provinces, thereby fostering a more inclusive climate action framework across South Africa.

4.4. Trends in Climate Mitigation Targets in the Private Sector

The climate mitigation targets set by South African private sector companies and MNCs exhibit significant variation across sectors—encompassing differences in target types, coverage, robustness, and intentions regarding offsetting. Notably, a strong commitment to climate action is evident among the country's top revenue-generating companies, all of which have established climate mitigation targets, with net zero goals being the most prevalent. This trend is particularly pronounced in the financial service, technology and telecommunications sectors, which generally have lower emission intensities compared to fossil fuel-based companies and heavy industries. Thereby facilitating the feasibility of net zero pledges.

Most of the analysed companies incorporate some level of scope 3 emissions coverage within their policies, and those that do often connect them to their offsetting strategies. While the prevalence of offsets suggests engagement in climate policy, the lack of detailed conditions surrounding these offsets raises concerns regarding their integrity. In contrast, fossil fuel companies demonstrate significantly lower engagement with robust climate mitigation targets, often lacking scope 3 emissions coverage. This may indicate inherent barriers to comprehensive climate action in emissions-intensive sectors. Moreover, interest in the use of offsets is limited among these companies, with vague details regarding their implementation casting doubt on the credibility of their commitments.

MNCs present a broader range of climate mitigation targets but tend to favour carbon neutrality pledges over net zero commitments. This trend suggests a reliance on offsetting, which may undermine their emphasis on significant emissions reductions and fundamental changes to their business models. This sort of reliance raises critical questions about the integrity of climate pledges that overly depend on offsets rather than committing to deeper transitions. Overall, the analysis reveals a complex landscape of climate mitigation targets within the South African private sector, exposing challenges related to transparency and the integrity of commitments reliant on offsetting practices.

4.5. Variability in Just Transition Commitments Across Sectors

The analysis uncovers considerable variability in just transition commitments across sectors, both within South Africa and among multinational companies. The financial services sector shows strong adherence to just transition principles, with leading firms such as Sanlam, Old Mutual, and Momentum prioritising workforce upskilling and community support—often influenced by their exposure to global markets and frameworks like the TCFD. These

companies are positioning themselves ahead of other industries in addressing the socio-economic ramifications of climate change.

Conversely, sectors such as telecommunications and technology acknowledge just transition principles but tend to exhibit less comprehensive planning and implementation, likely due to the relatively lower carbon intensity of their business models. Nevertheless, the expansion of digital infrastructure presents an opportunity for these sectors to embed robust just transition strategies, including local community support and sustainable supply chain alignment.

In the fossil fuel sector, state-owned enterprises like Eskom demonstrate leadership in developing detailed just transition frameworks. At the same time, other companies, including certain mining and logistics entities, vary in their commitment levels. Sasol stands out for its comprehensive just transition framework, which includes extensive retraining and community investment, thus setting a precedent for equity considerations within carbon-intensive industries. Among multinational firms, technology leaders such as Microsoft exhibit a clear commitment to just transition principles. In contrast, other sectors—such as automotive, food and beverage—show limited engagement with these considerations. This pattern indicates that detailed just transition planning is less prevalent than other sustainability strategies across various industries.

4.6. Challenges and Strategic Approaches to Emissions Management

Regions such as Gauteng, particularly urban centres like Johannesburg, face significant challenges related to emissions management and reporting. One of the most pressing issues is the ambiguity surrounding the specific emissions encompassed in climate commitments. This lack of clarity undermines both transparency and the effectiveness of climate strategies. To strengthen accountability and enable accurate progress assessments, it is crucial to define Scope 1 emissions (direct emissions from sources owned or controlled by the entity), Scope 2 emissions (indirect emissions from the consumption of purchased energy), and Scope 3 emissions (all other indirect emissions within the value chain). Establishing such clarity in emissions reporting is essential for fostering trust among stakeholders and ensuring that policies are aligned effectively to address the emissions across the full value chain of corporations.

In addition to precise emissions definitions, cities are exploring strategic approaches to meet climate targets. While offset mechanisms have not been a central feature of most provincial strategies, cities like Johannesburg, Tshwane, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and Bloemfontein have shown interest in incorporating offsetting mechanisms into their climate action plans. Comprehensive, transparent, and accountable systems must be established to verify that offsets substantively contribute to climate objectives and do not compromise local environmental integrity or displace direct emissions reduction efforts. Such a balanced approach to emissions management—emphasising clear reporting and effective offset strategies—can better equip cities to meet their climate commitments and drive sustainable progress.

5. Opportunities for Improvement and Recommendations

To address the observed disparities and enhance the effectiveness of climate strategies and just transition measures, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.1. Enhanced Alignment and Integration

Strengthen the alignment between city, provincial, and national climate strategies to ensure comprehensive and consistent climate action across all governance levels. Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing among different tiers of government, leveraging the recently passed Climate Change Act (2024) as a framework for national oversight and coordination[72]. The Act's focus on integrated planning and coordination can effectively bridge gaps between city and provincial strategies. Additionally, formal intergovernmental committees should be established to facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaborative planning efforts to address emerging climate challenges.

5.2. Targeted Support for Less Affluent Regions

Provide targeted support and resources to less affluent cities and provinces to enable them to develop and implement robust climate strategies and just transition measures. This support should include financial assistance, technical expertise, and capacity-building initiatives tailored to the unique needs of each region. The Climate Change Act (2024) outlines mechanisms for funding and technical support for disadvantaged regions, and these resources should be mobilised effectively to address resource disparities and foster equitable climate action[73]. Implementing mentorship programs between wealthier and less affluent regions can enhance knowledge transfer and build local capacity.

5.3. Sector-specific Strategies

Encourage sectors with lower engagement levels in just transition principles to develop more comprehensive strategies. This can be achieved through the establishment of sector-specific guidelines, incentives for developing detailed action plans, and enhanced transparency in reporting just transition commitments. The Climate Change Act (2024) promotes sector-specific action plans and reporting requirements, which should be utilised to standardise and elevate sectoral commitments[74]. Additionally, create platforms for sectors to share best practices and lessons learned, fostering collaboration and innovation in just transition planning.

5.4. Multinational Companies' Focus

Promote a stronger focus on just transition principles among multinational companies by encouraging them to adopt more detailed and specific commitments within their climate strategies. This can be facilitated through enhanced disclosure requirements and active stakeholder engagement processes. The Climate Change Act (2024) includes provisions for enhanced corporate reporting and stakeholder engagement, which should be leveraged to ensure that multinational companies integrate just transition principles more comprehensively[75]. Establishing partnerships between companies and local communities can foster mutual understanding and support for just transition initiatives.

5.5. Increased Integrity and Robustness of Targets

To strengthen the credibility of climate commitments, release standardised guidelines that ensure transparency and integrity in offsetting practices by providing clear criteria for offsetting, along with recommendations for entities to establish separate targets for emissions reductions and carbon removals to prevent overreliance on low-quality offsets. Additionally, encouraging the incorporation of scope 3 emissions into climate strategies is essential for a comprehensive understanding of total carbon footprints, enhancing commitment robustness, fostering accountability, and building stakeholder trust while aligning with broader sustainability and resilience goals.

5.6. Strategic Participation in Multilevel Partnerships

South Africa could consider engaging in multilevel partnerships that promote knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices on integrating equity into climate strategies across subnational levels. This collaboration would support the development and implementation of inclusive and integrated climate strategies, including NDCs and LT-LEDS. Such partnerships, exemplified by initiatives like the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP), could provide opportunities and lesson or strengthening climate governance at all levels.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Summary of Findings

This paper highlights several key insights into South Africa's climate landscape, focusing on governance levels at the national, provincial, and city, as well as the private sector.

Firstly, urban centres are at the forefront of climate action and equity integration. Cities such as Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Pretoria have demonstrated leadership by setting ambitious net zero targets and incorporating comprehensive just transition measures in their climate strategies. In many cases, these cities are surpassing provincial frameworks, illustrating their potential to lead climate initiatives and influence broader policy directions.

Secondly, the relationship between provincial and cities climate targets reveals significant dynamics. Provinces like the Western Cape have positively influenced city-level climate initiatives, though this influence tends to be predominantly one-directional, with cities aligning their strategies to meet provincial targets. This indicates a missed opportunity for provincial frameworks to draw inspiration from successful city-level actions, reinforcing the necessity for enhanced coordination and integration across governance levels to achieve cohesive and effective climate action.

In the private sector, there is notable variability in just transition commitments. While sectors like financial services and technology demonstrate strong commitments, others, such as telecommunications and fossil fuels, exhibit inconsistent levels of engagement. This variability underscores the need for sector-specific strategies and greater transparency to advance just transition practices across all industries.

6.2. Implications

Addressing the identified disparities is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of climate strategies in South Africa. Strengthening the alignment between city, provincial, and national strategies will ensure a more consistent and comprehensive approach to climate action. Providing targeted support and resources to less affluent regions will facilitate the broader adoption of robust climate strategies. Additionally, encouraging detailed sector-specific strategies and promoting more substantial just transition commitments among multinational companies will support a fair and inclusive transition.

6.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should investigate the engagement of MNCs with just transition and equity principles across various geographical contexts, particularly in regions outside the Northern Hemisphere. This inquiry has the potential to illuminate significant gaps and identify opportunities for promoting more inclusive practices. Additionally, employing sector-specific case studies to analyse the diverse interpretations and implementations of just transition principles will provide critical insights. Furthermore, exploring how MNCs conceptualise justice and equity within their climate strategies is essential, especially when these interpretations diverge from established norms. Such research endeavours will facilitate the development of frameworks that more accurately capture the complexities of equity and just transition across different contexts.

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