

THOUGHT PIECE | **Cloudy with a Chance of Sunshine**

Hope & Hurdles for Africa After G20 & COP30

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For Africa, the global energy transition remains a paradox: abundant with mineral resources and renewable energy potential yet characterised by widespread energy poverty. This energy-sector bottleneck and resultant energy gap presents a critical threat to the continent's economic development, prospective growth and its population's livelihood – hindering economic growth, in GDP terms, by 2-4% annually. This year, the inaugural G20 Summit hosted on African soil yielded significant commitments to expedite the shift towards low-emission, climate-resilient development, including Mission 300, which aims to triple global renewable capacities and incorporate principles of equity and sustainable energy transitions. These commitments underscored Africa's priorities, reflecting cautious optimism not only regarding an equity-based energy transition agenda but also concerning the broader state of multilateralism. Highlighted by increased asymmetric bilateral relations and the contestation of the fundamental value of international cooperation, the summit was conducted in the absence of the United States – a red flag for global climate governance.

Less than a month prior, this fragmentation was also evident at COP30 in Belém, Brazil, where significant divisions between fossil-fuel producers and nations vulnerable to climate change were on full display. Despite the United States's absence at COP30, progress was made with the approval of the Belém Package, which includes a dedicated Just Transition mechanism that emphasises people, equity, and social justice in climate transition planning — a first in COP history. Albeit at a pace considerably slower than what is necessary, these 'successes' reflect positive collective progress, vital for African countries where the majority of populations still lack reliable energy access and are among the most vulnerable to climate change globally.

Ultimately, the outcomes of both the G20 and COP30 need to serve as a foundation for advancing not only the “green transition” but also the “just transition”. As Africa navigates this mixed forecast of incremental wins and governance gaps, the pressing question becomes whether recent global commitments can translate into tangible progress for its just transition ambitions.

WHAT HOPE DO G20 & COP30 OFFER FOR AFRICA'S JUST TRANSITIONS?

G20 and COP30 offer Africa a mix of opportunities and challenges, raising the question of whether global pledges can translate into real progress on just transitions.

The absence of the US's input at the G20, whilst worrying, might, however, have inadvertently resulted in an overall stronger final declaration. The Johannesburg Declaration signalled to the world that multilateralism can still deliver, and progress can be made without the full participation of major economies. The timing of the G20 summit, which began on the last day of negotiations at COP30, also meant that the declaration was able to acknowledge COP30 outcomes, aligning and filling the gap on critical issues poorly reflected at COP.

Framing just transitions as a “development opportunity”, the Johannesburg Declaration emphasised economic elements such as green jobs, reskilling and inclusive growth. By linking climate goals to poverty eradication and social equity, the Declaration utilised an economic framing to support the goal of a just transition where “no one gets left behind” (i.e. a transition for everyone, not just the privileged few). On a continent with a burgeoning youth population and high levels of unemployment in most, growth in key sectors like small-scale manufacturing, green energy tech and even agriculture, could significantly transform the prospects for rapid and sustained employment and growth.

The Johannesburg declaration, however, softened language on fossil fuel phase-out to accommodate oil-producing nations, opting instead for aspirational, non-binding targets with a proposed timeframe of tripling renewables and doubling energy efficiency by 2030.



Credit: Priyanka Ukabhai

For example, the Declaration supports deployment of “zero- and low-emission technologies (including abatement and removal technologies)” by 2030 — but in a “technologically neutral, integrated, and inclusive” manner that takes into account national circumstances. This side-stepping of language around fossil fuel phase-out likely indicates resistance from major fossil fuel-producing countries. At the same time, the absence of the US and resistance from at least one other member state limited the ambition of the final agreement. At the same time, the softened language creates space for more realistic implementation, ensuring that targets are not only practical but also aligned with the actual resources and capacities available to African countries, thereby recognising the flexibility often needed by developing countries.

Similarly, COP30 in Belém failed to agree on a fossil fuel phase-out roadmap; however, it did deliver slightly stronger language on just transition. The summit established the Belém Action Mechanism (BAM) – an institutional platform to coordinate just transition initiatives globally and commits to championing justice and equity for vulnerable populations, Indigenous peoples, and workers, and explicitly calls for grant-based financing rather than debt-heavy instruments ([Biological Diversity](#)).

The COP30 outcomes text also explicitly embedded human rights obligations, labour protections, and participatory governance into the Just Transition Work Programme, marking a normative leap from the G20's economic framing to a rights-based approach. This could look like, for example, a government initiative that aims to incentivise local production of solar power manufacturing, while ensuring the integration of labour rights and social protections can lead to a growing sector that contributes to the fiscal space, and higher labour standards and productivity, which in turn creates momentum for further strengthening labour institutions and the workforce. This is one example of how just transition policy, which embeds both human and labour rights, policymakers create a mutually reinforcing cycle: stronger rights improve industrial outcomes, and stronger industries provide the resources to uphold rights. Overall, the shift in language from the G20's economic framing (jobs, investment, efficiency) to COP30's justice-centred approach (rights, equity, Indigenous inclusion) signals progress in embedding fairness into global climate governance. [With this clear political mandate, signalled by the COP30 BAM, and G20's reiteration of just transition pathways at the centre of climate action, African countries can now anchor just transition in national development plans, NDCs, long-term strategies, and energy master plans — with the legitimacy of global agreements behind them.

WHAT DO THE OUTCOMES OF G20 & COP30 MEAN DO FINANCING THE JUST TRANSITION IN AFRICA?

COP30's most concrete achievement was a pledge to triple adaptation finance by 2035. The G20, meanwhile, embraced the mantra of shifting financing "from billions to trillions" for sustainable energy infrastructure, and reaffirmed global commitments to the Paris temperature goals. This represents renewed hope for Africa, where the call for more ambitious commitment to funding adaptation has reverberated throughout the years- finally, a glimmer of hope, however, the 2035 timeline suggests African countries will still need to resource their most urgent adaptation actions in the coming decade. The next hurdle will not be whether the money is pledged, but whether it materialises— and whether it is affordable, accessible, and aligned with African priorities at the time.

In terms of ensuring fit-for-purpose and accessible finance, under South Africa's G20 presidency, the focus on debt, development and financial governance meant a greater push for stronger debt-treatment mechanisms (Common Framework), more transparent creditor practices, and concessional finance windows for vulnerable countries. Ensuring the availability of financial instruments like guarantees and blended-finance facilities alone will allow for significant progress in de-risking investments, crowding in private capital, and enabling countries with constrained fiscal space to undertake the scale of climate action required. If African countries can sustain this momentum post South Africa's chairmanship, this will create the foundation for operationalising and achieving a just transition through the easing of debt, provision of fit-for-purpose financial instruments for investing in clean energy and therefore ensuring just transition pathways remain financially feasible and practically implementable.

Arguably, a silver lining to the absence of the US at least is that Africa now has stronger global backing for renewable-energy access, climate finance, debt reform, and just transition frameworks than ever before. The combination of the G20's development-finance orientation and COP30's justice-focused climate instruments could, if mobilized properly, fund a transformation of African energy, industry, and social infrastructure. Nevertheless, both COP30 outcome on tripling adaptation finance and G20's call for a shift from billions to trillions in sustainable finance, together with reforms to reduce borrowing costs, there is some hope that African countries can now design costed just-transition plans and align them with incoming adaptation, resilience, and sustainable energy financing streams.



Credit: Priyanka Ukabhai

HOPE FOR A JUST TRANSITION PROPELLED BY AFRICA'S GREEN INDUSTRIALISATION

For decades, Africa has struggled to fully capitalise on its abundant mineral wealth. Structural barriers, such as limited domestic processing and refining capacity, slow and uneven industrialisation frameworks, inadequate infrastructure, weak bargaining power in global value chains, and policy frameworks favouring raw exports, have kept value addition out of reach. The G20's newly launched Critical Minerals Framework could, theoretically, change this trajectory for Africa

By recognising that minerals like cobalt, lithium, manganese, and rare earths should be processed and refined within producer countries, the framework opens the door for beneficiation and local value creation. To realise this potential, African governments must invest in processing capacity, technology transfer, regional energy infrastructure and strong governance. Importantly, the G20 framework lays the foundation for countries to become more deliberate about integrating mineral beneficiation into their just transition plans- shifting to value-addition and creating employment in the process.

Crucially (and ironically), achieving the beneficiation and value chain addition itself will also require an increase in sustained energy supply, underscoring the fact that a just transition in the African context is not simply about decarbonisation, but the glaring co-dependency between just transition ambitions and existing energy supply gaps. Without addressing persistent energy-access gaps, ambition for industrialisation and inclusive economic transformation will falter. In a way, both COP30 and G20, despite diluted language on a "fossil-fuel phase out" and the G20's framing of just transitions as a "development opportunity", have reinforced a critical principle: development and low-carbon, decarbonised growth can advance together, rather than at the expense of one another.

WHAT'S THE FORECAST FOR OPERATIONALISING THE JUST TRANSITION?

Cloudy with a chance of sunshine- Despite US disengagement at the G20 and its absence from COP30, multilateralism did not collapse. Instead, 80+ countries backed Brazil's call for a fossil-fuel phase-out roadmap (even though this occurred outside the UNFCCC process), and civil society mobilised unprecedented pressure for equity-based transitions ([UN News](#)). This resilience underscored a critical truth: while asymmetric bilateralism threatens global climate governance, collective action remains possible, and in 2025, Africa was central to this achievement.



Nevertheless, while both G20 and COP30 show that multilateral institutions can still function — even in a fracturing global order — whether they deliver real, just transitions for Africa depends heavily on follow-through, domestic implementation, and bridging the gap between declaratory commitments and concrete action. Ultimately, the absence of unified leadership — and the reliance on voluntary, soft-law instruments — on the one hand could leave Africa behind, especially if wealthy nations backslide on finance commitments, a possible eventuality Africa cannot afford. On the other hand, it could present an opportunity for African countries, through their diplomatic blocs such as the African Union and African Group of Negotiators, to exert their influence at forthcoming multilateral negotiations (G20, COP31).

WHAT DO AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS NEED TO CAPITALISE ON THIS YEAR'S MOMENTUM?

Ultimately, both COP30 and G20 have contributed to the foundation and enabling conditions for moving toward operationalising just transition in Africa; but significant gaps remain before ambition can translate into action. Successfully operationalising a just transition will hinge on political will, institutional capacity and strategic coordination. Given the long timelines attached to the realisation of many multilateral commitments, African governments will need to strategically complement national efforts with regional coordination, to strengthen energy markets, transport corridors, capitalise on the continent's human and natural resources, and harness the necessary partnerships for the continent's prosperity.

The urgency of climate change presents an opportunity for a new wave of home-grown solutions: sectoral transition plans, regional coordination platforms, and industrial-policy toolkits designed to unlock the continent's mineral wealth and beneficiation potential. Equally critical is investing in the capacity of government and planning institutions as they will drive implementation of the transition. If these elements align, Africa can transform global commitments into tangible progress ensuring that, despite the clouds, the beautiful African sun will have every chance of breaking through and illuminating a more hopeful path forward.

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