



Africa
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Insights & Perspectives

Rethinking Just Energy Transition in Africa: Putting Politics at the Centre

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Introduction

In our efforts to achieve a just energy transition, we often find ourselves caught between big global goals and the harsh, daily realities people face across Africa. The process, whether it is shaping policies, building capacity, or expanding energy access, is not some distant or theoretical exercise. It happens on the ground amid urgent and overlapping crises. Climate change brings severe weather and environmental shocks that threaten the livelihoods of many. Energy poverty leaves millions without access to reliable, affordable, and clean energy, thereby limiting opportunities for health, education, and economic growth. At the same time, political struggles over power, resources, and priorities shape how and whether energy transitions occur. These crises do not stand alone; they interact and reinforce each other, making the path to a just transition a complex and deeply political endeavour. While we often attempt to solve these problems with technical solutions, such as reforms and programs, we must recognise that the reality extends far beyond that.

There is no single, unifying concept of justice that applies to all contexts. What appears to benefit only one community, actor, or region can result in real material losses for another. Justice is not something that can be checked-off, like a list of requirements. It is a continuous process of negotiating different interests, histories, and future possibilities. In the context of the energy transition, it means we must be aware that clean energy, while essential, can

sometimes replicate existing patterns of exclusion and inequality if we do not actively address them through political and social action.

We often discuss the energy transition in terms of reducing emissions and shifting technologies, but it is just as essential to humanise this process. A just transition must go beyond technical fixes to address poverty reduction, create new economic opportunities, and ensure the benefits of clean energy are shared fairly. It should support labour by enabling fair work conditions and providing opportunities for reskilling and decent employment in new industries. In this way, the transition can build a future where people feel empowered, secure, and included. Therefore, for those of us working on climate and energy policy, whether in government, civil society, labour unions, or the private sector, it means focusing not only on decarbonising the economy but also on restoring and transforming communities and livelihoods in the process.

The Limits of Capacity Building Without Political Will

The lack of technical expertise, insufficient data, and underdeveloped legal frameworks are usually identified as factors contributing to the slow progress in Africa's energy transition. Indeed, these are genuine constraints that can and should be addressed through targeted capacity-building interventions such as training programs, technical assistance, and institutional strengthening. Capacity building plays a crucial role in equipping actors with the necessary tools and knowledge to navigate complex reforms.

However, when reforms stall or fail to deliver meaningful outcomes, the problem often runs deeper. Capacity constraints usually become a convenient narrative that masks the more uncomfortable reality that some actors are simply unwilling to advance changes that threaten entrenched power or disrupt established interests. Without political will and a commitment to just outcomes, even the most well-resourced capacity-building efforts will fall short.

Political will is not merely a vague desire. It is the commitment of leaders and decision-makers to prioritise certain goals, even when faced with opposition, short-term costs, or the erosion of personal or factional benefits. Many well-intentioned reforms falter not from a lack of competence but because key decision-makers, driven by vested interests or short-term political expediency, choose not to implement them.

In the context of energy transition, a lack of political will or limited elite commitment can manifest in several ways. For example, elected officials usually operate on political cycles. Policies that yield immediate, visible benefits may be prioritised over long-term, sustainable energy strategies that require difficult decisions and upfront investments. Thus, climate goals, which often have longer payback periods and diffuse benefits, rarely win elections in the same way that other forms of extractives would. Additionally, energy transition agendas are usually perceived as externally imposed or driven by Western philosophies rather than genuinely owned by national governments. In this case, there will be little sustained political commitment to their implementation.

The energy sector can also be a prime avenue for rent-seeking and political patronage. Contracts may be awarded based on political ties rather than efficiency, leading to inflated costs and substandard infrastructure. We cannot assume that integrating energy transition measures will automatically curb rent-seeking behaviours among political actors. The transition can even open up new avenues for corruption and rent-seeking behaviours if not accompanied by robust governance and transparency mechanisms. Reforming such systems and entrenched political interests requires a significant commitment from the elite.

Therefore, our focus must extend beyond simply building skills to devise pragmatic ways of shifting elite interests towards new, cleaner forms of energy with effective transparency mechanisms. This approach requires a nuanced understanding of the political economy of the energy sector, recognising who benefits and who loses from current structures. We must deploy politically smart strategies. These include conducting robust political economy analysis to map diverse interests and employing targeted communication to resonate with local priorities. This approach also demands critical self-reflection within our institutions to ensure our interventions truly align with the complex political realities on the ground.

Reframing the Narrative: From Burden to Opportunity

The way we frame the energy transition is just as crucial as the technical solutions we propose, especially when engaging with governments. It is essential to understand that the government's priorities are often shaped by immediate, tangible concerns. Budgets are tight, public opinion can be fickle, and political cycles demand visible wins. In this context, climate goals, which are perceived as abstract, often take a back seat to the pressing need to feed people and keep the lights on.

Currently, clean energy is frequently viewed through the lens of its perceived downsides: intermittency, higher initial costs and inherent risks. These perceptions create a barrier to adoption. To advocate effectively, our framing must undergo a radical shift to reflect the realities of governance. We need to move away from presenting our initiatives as a "correction" to existing government plans and instead position ourselves as partners in co-developing solutions that directly address national priorities. This approach includes highlighting how clean energy can deliver energy security, create local jobs, foster economic development, reduce reliance on volatile fossil fuel markets, and provide reliable power for homes and businesses. These benefits resonate deeply with citizens and can genuinely inform government decisions. Reframing clean energy as a strategic opportunity rather than a costly obligation can unlock the needed elite commitment for a just and equitable transition.

Collaboration and Reimagining Success

Ultimately, the complex work of a just energy transition simply cannot be done by any single individual or organisation. Building strong coalitions must be a deliberate and strategic cornerstone of our efforts. This means actively seeking out and nurturing champions within state institutions, even if they are few, and working alongside them to build momentum that is irreversible.

The opportunity before us is immense: to move beyond seeing the energy transition as merely a technical pathway. Instead, we can reimagine it as a project that reclaims development from the grip of extractivism, forging a shared, generative future for all. This profound shift begins not with certainty but with humility and the courage to ask more profound questions.

Latest Publication

Climate Action in Ghana

People, Policy, and Circular Solutions for a Resilient Future



At ACEP, we recognise that addressing the climate crisis requires more than high-level commitments; it demands inclusive, evidence-based, and context-specific solutions. This book is born out of our commitment to galvanise multi-stakeholder efforts by drawing together research evidence and practical insights from academia, civil society, and industry professionals. Our goal is to bridge the gap between knowledge and action, creating a platform that promotes collaboration, learning, and shared responsibility.

A compelling feature of this volume is its deliberate blend of scientific analysis and traditional ecological knowledge. This fusion reflects our belief that climate solutions must be both innovative and rooted in the lived experiences of communities. Indigenous wisdom, passed down through generations,

often offers time-tested approaches to environmental stewardship that are increasingly relevant in today's climate conversations.

Beyond this, the book highlights the transformative potential of technology and data-driven approaches in building climate resilience. From digital tools that enhance climate monitoring to innovations in clean energy and mobility, these contributions explore how Ghana can harness modern systems to address urgent environmental challenges. The role of policy is also foregrounded, with chapters offering thoughtful discussions on governance structures, regulatory frameworks, and strategic interventions to drive sustainable outcomes.

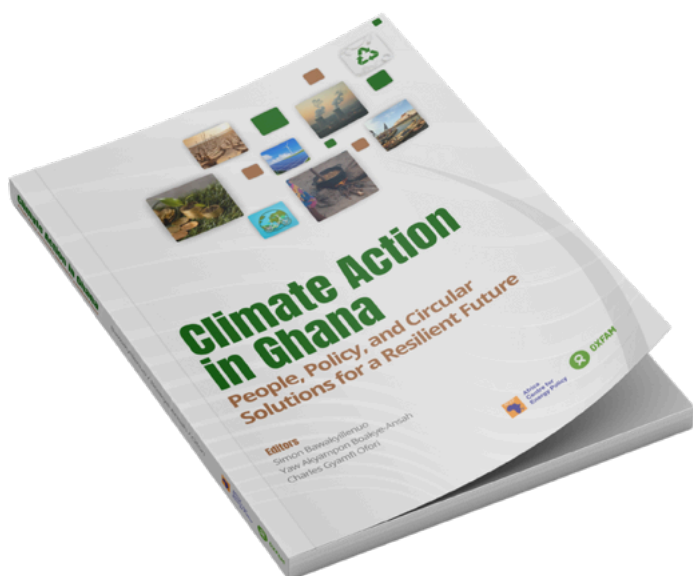
Financing climate action is a recurring theme throughout the book, and rightly so. Without robust, targeted, and sustained financing, many promising interventions will remain unrealised. The chapters underscore the importance of mobilising both public and private capital, while proposing models that can unlock greater investment for climate resilience and low-carbon development.

Each chapter is designed to serve a broad audience including academics, policymakers, and industry actors alike. More importantly, the contributions are not only analytical but action-oriented. They each provide clear recommendations, outlining the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in Ghana's climate transition.

Ultimately, this book is a call to action. Climate change is a shared challenge that requires our collective commitment and coordinated effort. We hope that this publication will inspire renewed urgency, foster collaboration, and serve as a valuable resource for anyone committed to building a sustainable and climate-resilient Ghana.

Let us act, together.

Download a copy [here](#).



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This book blends scientific evidence with traditional ecological knowledge. This approach reinforces what many in the CVF already understand: that resilience is not only built in labs or boardrooms but in neighbourhoods and communities, in the fields and on the streets, through lived experiences, cultural systems, and indigenous wisdom.

H.E. Mohamed Nasheed

Secretary-General, Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF)

Former President, Maldives

Program/Event Highlight

Africa Climate Academy 2025

May 19-23, 2025 | ACEP Office Complex, Accra

From May 19 to 23, 2025, the Africa Climate Academy convened over 50 participants from more than 20 African countries in Accra for an intensive week of learning and exchange. Drawn from policymaking, civil society, academia, and media, participants engaged with urgent issues at the intersection of climate change, energy transition, and Africa's development. The Academy serves as a transformative platform to challenge assumptions, reshape perceptions, and deepen understanding of climate and energy in the African context.

Participants were grounded in Africa's climate realities, exploring the continent's exposure to extreme heat, droughts, floods, and coastal erosion and the urgent need for context-specific adaptation and mitigation. These discussions were further deepened by reflections on climate justice, equity, and global legal frameworks, with a particular emphasis on Africa's role in international negotiations.

The Academy introduced tools for climate-smart policy and planning alongside financing options such as the Green Climate Fund and green bonds. It also examined Africa's oil and gas dilemma in a decarbonising world, highlighting the tension between development and climate ambition. Methane and other superpollutants were examined for their impact on near-term warming, while sessions on clean energy innovation highlighted the potential of local value chains in driving job creation, resilience, and industrial growth. The Academy concluded with reflections on governance and accountability, emphasising the importance of robust institutions, public engagement, and integrity in climate finance.

As participants return to their respective countries and institutions, they carry with them not only knowledge but also renewed resolve and a continent-wide network of peers.





Program/Event Highlight

Clean Cooking Dialogue for Climate Action and Public Health

May 24, 2025 | ISSER, University of Ghana, Legon



Access to clean cooking remains one of Ghana's most pressing development challenges, with far-reaching implications for public health, gender equality, climate resilience, and sustainable energy. Over 80% of households in Sub-Saharan Africa still rely on polluting fuels, leading to serious health issues and environmental degradation. Despite some progress made, major gaps remain in adopting clean, affordable cooking solutions.

On Thursday, 22nd May 2025, ACEP, in partnership with Oxfam in Ghana, convened policymakers, innovators, researchers, civil society, and private sector actors to advance Ghana's clean cooking agenda. The dialogue explored innovative technologies, financing, and collaboration to achieve universal access to clean, sustainable cooking energy.

Key discussions revealed both opportunities and challenges. While LPG dominates Ghana's clean cooking sector, ethanol

emerged as a promising alternative, though cost and distribution barriers persist. Carbon financing has shown potential for scaling solutions, but it requires stronger monitoring systems. Participants identified crucial gaps in coordination between institutions, leading to inconsistent data and policies. Enhanced data systems and collaboration are necessary to align with national clean cooking policies and SDG 7 targets. Other barriers include inadequate fuel standards, poorly adapted stove designs, and limited public awareness.

Moving forward, stakeholders committed to enhancing coordination through existing platforms such as the Ghana Alliance for Clean Cooking, expanding research partnerships, and developing targeted awareness campaigns. The private sector emphasized the need for affordable business models and supportive policies to increase accessibility.



Coming Up

The Future of Energy Conference (FEC) 2025

August 26-27, 2025 | Labadi Beach Hotel, Accra



Energy poverty remains Africa's most significant development challenge. More than 600 million people across the continent still live without electricity. Factories sit idle, hospitals operate in the shadows, and students study by candlelight. This energy crisis stifles economic growth and dims the promise of a brighter future for millions.

Tackling this crisis takes more than ambition; it demands investment. Africa needs over \$64 billion annually to achieve universal energy access by 2030. However, current financing falls short, leaving millions in the dark and hindering the continent's potential.

This urgent challenge is at the heart of the 2025 Future of Energy Conference: ***Financing Africa's Energy Future: Unlocking Investments for Energy Access and Economic Transformation.***

On 26th – 27th August, 2025, at the Labadi Beach Hotel in Accra, Ghana, we are convening policymakers, investors, development partners, private sector actors, researchers, innovators, and civil society leaders, among others, to unlock solutions and drive action.

Over the two days, the Conference offers multiple ways to engage:

- Plenary sessions featuring bold ideas and real-world solutions
- Side events that ignite meaningful dialogue and new partnerships
- An exhibition of cutting-edge clean energy technologies and investment prospects
- An innovation challenge spotlighting Africa's brightest minds and game-changing ideas

Africa's energy story is still being written. Will you help shape the next chapter?

Register now: <https://acep.africa/fec-2025/>



Future of Energy Conference 2025

THEME

Financing Africa's Energy Future: Unlocking Investments for Energy Access and Economic Transformation

Panel Discussions

Innovation & Investment Arena

Side Events

Innovation Challenge

Register here:

acep.africa/fec-2025/



**26th-27th August,
2025**



**Labadi Beach Hotel,
Accra**

#FEC2025

[REGISTER HERE](#)

[DOWNLOAD CONCEPT NOTE](#)



Call for Applications

Next Generation Resource Governance Leaders Program (Cohort 9)



The Next Generation Resource Governance Leaders Program is an internship that intends to balance a dose of theory with real-world application and equip participants with the requisite multi-disciplinary intellectual development, practical skills, and research abilities to think in more innovative ways to solve complex governance challenges. The Program is also a strategy to build a pipeline of young pan-African leaders to provide a sustainable path for good governance.

The core of our ambition is to train and nurture young people in an enabling working environment through a structured capacity development process. These will include training on transformational leadership development, professional and career development, and digital communication and technology skills. Essentially, beyond the technical training in resource governance, interns will be exposed to the tools and guidance needed to set and achieve realistic personal and professional goals, coupled with well-rounded and ethical leadership training.

ACEP is calling for applications for the 9th cohort of the Program.

Applicants must be young Africans residing on the continent who are passionate about ensuring that Africa's energy and extractive resources drive sustainable and inclusive development.

More here: <https://acep.africa/nextgen9/>



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ACEP is a thought leader in Africa's energy and extractives governance space, working towards improving economic transformation and inclusive sustainable development. We contribute to developing alternative and innovative policy interventions through high-quality research, analysis, and advocacy in Africa's energy and extractives sector.