



THE GREEN ECONOMY: OPPORTUNITIES, SECTORS AND INNOVATION

Just transition, green jobs and NDCs

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WHAT IS THE GREEN ECONOMY?

Low-carbon, resource-efficient and socially inclusive

The UN Environment Programme describes a green economy as one that improves wellbeing and equity while sharply cutting environmental risk and resource pressure. In plain terms, it grows the economy without wrecking the climate, and shares the gains.

Low-carbon

Growth is decoupled from rising emissions, not fuelled by them.

Resource-efficient

More value from less energy, less material and less waste.

Socially inclusive

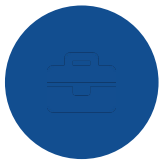
Benefits are shared widely, not captured by a few.

Not one sector. It is a way of organising the whole economy, from energy to farming to finance.

Framing after UNEP (2017) and GIZ/IISD, Just Transition to a Green Economy (2021).

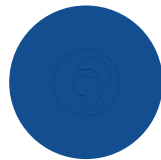
THE OPPORTUNITY: WHY NOW

The largest economic restructuring in a generation



16.6m

people already work in renewable energy worldwide (2024)



24m

new jobs the green transition could add globally by 2030 (ILO)



Trillions

in yearly investment are shifting toward low-carbon assets

Young people are entering the labour market exactly as this shift accelerates. The jobs, firms and skills of the next three decades are being defined now, not later.

SECTORS AND INNOVATION

Where green growth is concentrated, and who is building it



Renewable energy

Solar, wind, hydro and storage



Agriculture and land

Climate-smart farming, restoration



Circular economy

Recycling, repair, clean cooking



Green buildings

Efficient design and retrofits



Sustainable transport

Public, electric, non-motorised



Water and nature

Catchments, wetlands, blue economy

Africa holds close to 60% of the world's best solar but only about 2% of the jobs. Pay-as-you-go and off-grid solar, much of it African-built, are already closing that gap.

GREEN JOBS: THE NUMBERS AND THE CATCH

A real opportunity, on conditions

3.8 – 7.9m

green jobs Africa could add by 2030, rising to as much as 84 million by 2050

~86%

of those 2030 jobs are projected to be informal, outside formal labour protection

- Few other shifts offer this much new employment.
- But quality is the open question. Women and young people are expected to gain, often in lower-value roles.
- The distance between the high and the low scenario, millions of jobs, is not fate. It is set by policy, finance and skills.

Source: FSD Africa, Shortlist and Shell Foundation (2026).

A WORKER-CENTRED LENS

How the IEJ approaches this, with COSATU

The IEJ and COSATU set out A Worker-Centred Framework for Financing the Just Transition (2025). It judges the green economy by who it serves, and can be divided into two areas.

Restructure

Govern private and blended finance with firm rules, so the terms serve workers, not only investors.

Redistribute

Raise and direct resources at home, through fair taxes and a standing climate fund, run through reformed public banks.

Not only how much green finance and how many green jobs, but who owns the assets, who carries the risk and who pays. People over profit.

Source: IEJ and COSATU, A Worker-Centred Framework for Financing the Just Transition (2025).

THE JUST TRANSITION CONDITION

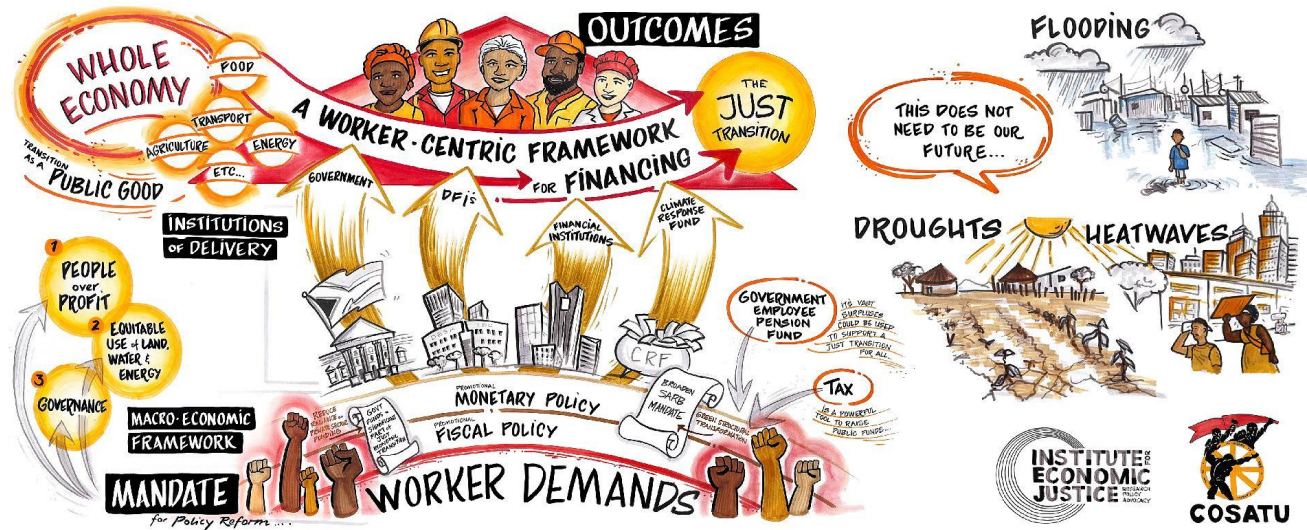
The green economy is not automatically fair

- A greener economy creates and destroys jobs at once. Fossil and mining-dependent regions can lose out, and early ILO modelling warned parts of Africa could see little net gain without deliberate policy.
- The ILO's Just Transition Guidelines say the shift should be negotiated between workers, employers and government, with costs and benefits shared fairly. Where social protection is thinner, this matters even more.
- Engagement is the deciding factor. South Africa's Eskom restructuring treats labour as a partner. Where engagement is skipped, we have observed that reforms stall.

The IEJ worker-centred test: assess jobs created, lost and needing reskilling; keep value local; and design finance so women and youth are not last in line for work, land and energy.

Sources: IEJ and COSATU (2025); GIZ/IISD (2021); ILO, Just Transition Guidelines (2015).

IEJ & COSATU Worker Centred Framework



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Sources: IEJ and COSATU (2025); GIZ/IISD (2021); ILO, Just Transition Guidelines (2015).

NDCS: FROM PLEDGES TO JOBS

National plans that steer investment

- NDCs, Nationally Determined Contributions, are each country's climate plan under the Paris Agreement, updated every five years.
- They are no longer just emissions targets. They increasingly set out green industrial plans, adaptation priorities and just transition and jobs commitments.
- They act as investment signals: an NDC tells investors and workers where a country intends to grow. For most developing countries, delivery depends on international finance.

COP30's Belém Package placed just transition and scaled-up finance at the centre. NDCs are where those words become national plans, and where youth can push.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUTH

Four ways to move from the audience to the table



Build green skills

The fastest-growing roles need people. Vocational and technical training count as much as degrees.



Start and join green enterprises

Many new jobs will come from small, local firms, not large plants.



Shape the plans

NDCs, transition frameworks and budgets are being written now. Youth belong in the drafting.



Hold finance accountable

Ask who owns the assets, who carries the risk and who pays. Better terms are won, not given.

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Thank you. Questions welcome.

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