



“Three sites of power, three strategies” How the IEJ-COSATU worker-centred financing framework aims to shift control over the just transition and the theory behind each move

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- UNFCCC'S YOUTH 4 CAPACITY event 26.05.26*

FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

Three sites of power, three strategies

- 1. Rules of finance** Who sets central bank mandates, green taxonomies, and the terms of public lending
Strategy: Institutional capture
- 2. Terms of the deal** Who controls how multilateral agreements are interpreted and implemented
Strategy: Discursive contestation
- 3. Legitimacy of the process** Whose knowledge counts, and who gets a seat at the table
Strategy: Recognition

SITE 1: RULES OF FINANCE

Site 1: Rules of finance Who writes the rules that govern our money?

STRATEGY: INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE

Use legislation and regulation to change what public and private institutions are legally required to do. The state is not permanently owned by any one group. It is a terrain that can be contested and redirected through parliamentary testimony, DFI mandate reviews, and pension regulation reform.

THEORY: CONTESTED TERRAIN (Miliband / Poulantzas)

The state reflects class relations but is not fixed. Progressive forces can use institutional access to rewrite what the state must do, especially during legislative windows or government transitions.

Limit: Depends on legislative access. Does not transfer where central bank independence is constitutionally locked in.

SA example: SARB Amendment Bill, expanded Green Finance Taxonomy, DFI mandate reform

SITE 2: TERMS OF THE DEAL

Site 2: Terms of the deal Who decides what the agreements actually mean?

STRATEGY: DISCURSIVE CONTESTATION

Multilateral language is never fixed. It is reproduced every time someone submits a document, gives a speech, or writes a briefing note. Naming an alternative (domestic monetary reform as mobilisation, not only private de-risking) changes what is thinkable in the negotiating room.

THEORY: HEGEMONY (Gramsci)

Dominant ideas rule not by force but by consent. The ‘billions to trillions’ narrative and de-risking as the solution are hegemonic positions, not technical facts. Counter-hegemonic work means producing alternatives that become common sense through evidence, repetition, and coalition.

Limit: Requires UNFCCC observer status or allied delegations. Many Global South unions and civil society organisations lack this access.

SA example: DFFE submission, briefing AGN delegates, COSATU op-eds, IEJ publications

SITE 3: LEGITIMACY OF THE PROCESS

Site 3: Legitimacy of the process Whose knowledge counts, and who gets a seat?

STRATEGY: RECOGNITION

Demand that workers, unions, and communities are formal parties to transition planning, not recipients of decisions made elsewhere. Social dialogue is not consultation. It is shared agenda-setting. The ILO's just transition guidelines and the JTWP text both name social dialogue as central. Use those hooks.

THEORY: PARTICIPATORY PARITY (Nancy Fraser)

Justice requires all affected parties to participate as peers in the institutions that govern their lives. Recognition shapes what evidence is admissible, what solutions are treated as legitimate, and what gets funded. Exclusion from the process is itself a form of power.

Limit: Formal recognition without power over resources reproduces symbolic inclusion. Must be combined with strategies 1 and 2 to have material effect.

SA example: NEDLAC tripartite social dialogue, COSATU Blueprint as a primary policy document, not a stakeholder input

THE SOUTH AFRICA CASE

Why all three strategies matter together

South Africa is unusual in deploying all three strategies simultaneously and in coordination. A win on recognition without institutional capture leaves workers with a seat but no money. A win on rules without changing the narrative gets reversed in the next policy cycle. The strategies are most powerful when they reinforce each other.

THE DIAGNOSTIC QUESTION

Which site of power is most accessible in your context right now?

Institutional capture: Do you have a route into the legislative or regulatory process?

Discursive contestation: Do you have access to the arenas where the language is made?

Recognition: Is there an opening for formal social dialogue or stakeholder inclusion?

Most contexts have access to one or two strategies. The task is to use that access to build leverage for the others.

Relevant Reading

- International Labour Organisation (ILO). 2015. Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All.
- UNFCCC. United Arab Emirates Just Transition Work Programme overview and documents hub.
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- Gramsci, A. 1971. Selections from the Prison Notebooks. International Publishers.
- Fraser, N. 2000. Rethinking recognition. New Left Review 3: 107–120.
- Miliband, R. 1969. The State in Capitalist Society. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Poulantzas, N. 1978. State, Power, Socialism. London: Verso.
- National Treasury (South Africa). 2022. South African Green Finance Taxonomy v1.0.
- South African Reserve Bank (SARB). Acts and Bills (for SARB Amendment Bill materials
- Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ). Publications on just transition and worker-centred financing. <https://iej.org.za/>



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