

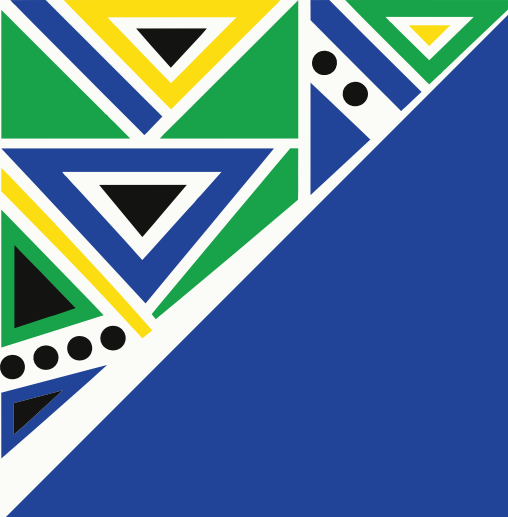
Concept Note

Making
Africa's Energy
Transition Work:
Local Manufacturing,
Decent Work,
and Sustainable
Livelihoods



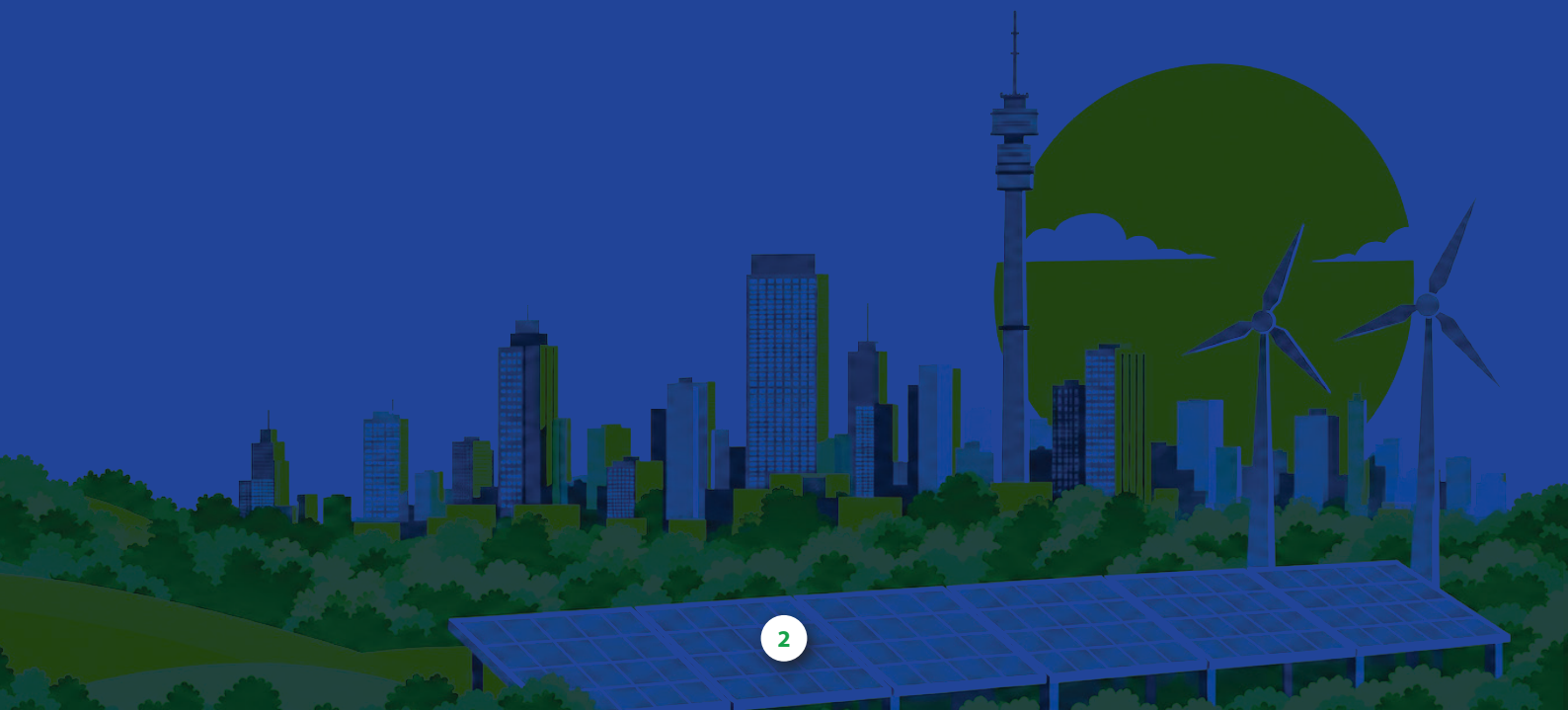
Thursday, 8- Friday, 9 October 2026
Southern Sun Hotel, Rosebank,
Johannesburg





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Introduction

This conference is one of a series of activities under the project entitled “The Just Energy Transition: Localisation, Decent Work, Small-Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Sustainable Livelihoods”. This project is a collaborative effort of The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ), the Confederation of South Africa’s Trade Unions (COSATU), the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), and the African Centre for Energy Policy (ACEP).

The project aims to develop public policy interventions and advocacy support necessary to cement decent work and sustainable livelihoods, particularly for workers and women, through the localisation of renewable energy value chains, with a focus on SMEs’ capability development in Kenya, Ghana and South Africa. In examining opportunities for women in renewable production networks, we build from a marxist feminist framework, exploring how women’s role in supplying unpaid social reproductive labour, may undermine their power in the workplace, while subsidising capitalist production. This concept note provides the background, purpose and scope, objectives, a proposed agenda, and preparatory reading.



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Background context

For the African continent, climate change poses a range of social, ecological and economic risks. Transitions, advanced in response to climate change, present a range of risks and opportunities. Among these is the potential to harness global and local resource mobilisation for renewable energy production to support local (and regional) economic and industrial development and employment creation.

Potential employment creation, green industrialisation (through firm, value chain and sector development), and the expansion of domestic economic value added in transition-relevant sectors are key levers in 'just transition' policy responses. Broadly, the 'just transition' refers to the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy in a manner that also prioritises the needs of workers and affected communities. This requires the management of unemployment and economic losses arising from the shift away from fossil fuels, livelihood support for those affected, and the amelioration of the destructive social, labour, and ecological legacies these value chains have shaped.

Facilitating a just transition also requires drawing attention to who captures the potential economic gains from transitions and whether workers, marginalised groups (such as women), and developing countries benefit. Without pointed intervention, it is likely that costs and benefits would be distributed along the lines of existing global economic structures, with the countries and corporations in the Global North capturing value/profits while localising and socialising costs and risks.

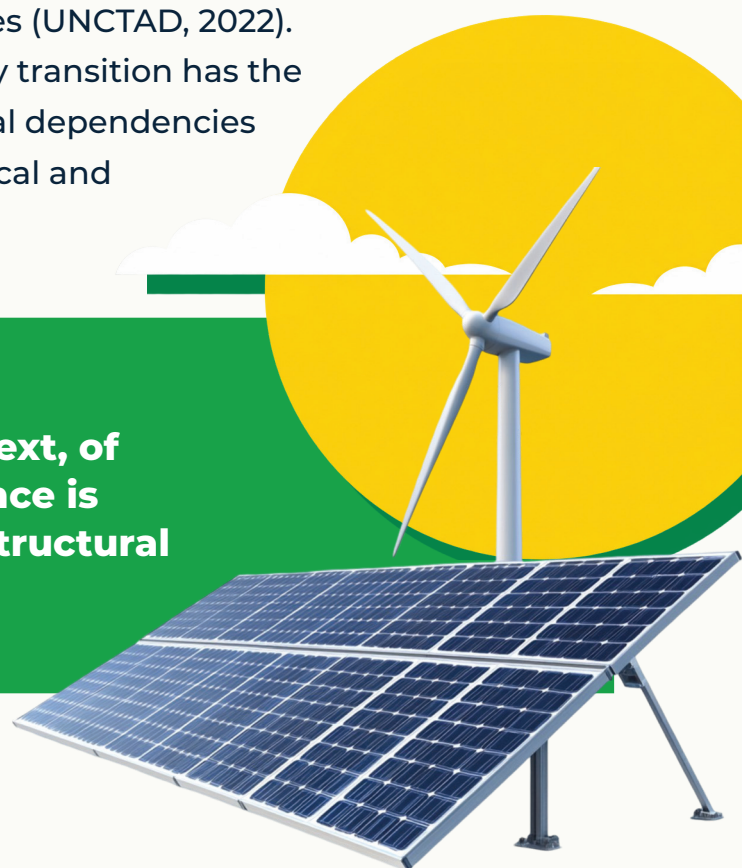


Sustainable energy transitions do, however, offer an opportunity to reconfigure these economic relations. Much of this promise turns on the realisation of the localisation of renewable energy value chains, as well as the accessibility and affordability of the resultant power, to drive developmental priorities in Global South countries. As identified in the IDRC call, SMMEs stand to play a critical role in renewable energy value chains and hence their local development is central to achieving just transitions. Any efforts at localisation must grapple with the nature of energy SMMEs and the structural barriers they confront.

In the African context, of particular importance is the imperative of structural transformation. This refers to production shifting towards higher value-added and higher productivity activities, often in combination with a growing share of formal sector employment. It points to the critical need to move away from commodity-dependent economies embedded within neocolonial networks of extraction often dominated by multinational corporations. For example, more than three-quarters of African countries rely on commodity exports for more than 70% of their total merchandise export revenues (UNCTAD, 2022). Approached in this manner, the energy transition has the potential to disrupt entrenched colonial dependencies and produce more reciprocal geopolitical and international economic exchange.



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Purpose and Scope

The conference will provide a space for a rigorous and lively discussion of the research findings and outputs of the project. This includes initial conceptualisation and desktop research as well as reports on field work and detailed case studies for different renewable energy sectors. The work presented and discussed spans South Africa, Ghana and Kenya and looks at a range of renewable energy system components/subcomponents, including Solar Panels, Inverters, Batteries and Wind towers. The conference will aim to strengthen key stakeholders' understanding of the potential for renewable energy localisation and a Just Transition.

Focus countries



Renewable energy system components



Objectives



To showcase the work done by the project partners.



To get feedback and rigorous discussion with experts in the field.



To share findings with key stakeholders such as organised labour and community organisations in affected areas.



To foster an alliance between local manufacturing businesses and organised labour and community organisations, regarding green industrialisation.



To learn from other countries' success and failures in their own energy transitions.

Format, processes and participation

This will be a two-day in-person workshop to be held in October 2026. It will be attended by partners: IEJ, COSATU, African Center for Energy Policy ACEP and African Center for Technology Studies ACTS in addition to some members of the reference groups. Additionally, a range of experts, labour organisers, members of affected communities, and policy makers will be invited both as audience members and as discussants. The total number of participants attending in person will be between 80-100. Additionally, we will include the possibility for online participation in the main sessions.



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