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Position on Just Transition for SB64

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*The **LAYCS Fellowship** is a capacity and leadership strengthening program designed to support young Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) leaders from Latin America in deepening their engagement in international climate policy spaces, this year with a special focus on Just Transition and Adaptation. These briefings reflect our values: sharing knowledge, opening doors, and making negotiation spaces more accessible to the wider youth movement. By publishing them, we aim to bring others closer to the process and strengthen collective strategies for climate justice. If you have any questions or feedback, please reach out via info@laycs.org, LinkedIN or Instagram.*

Context

This briefing focuses on the implementation of just transition within international climate governance, particularly under the UNFCCC, and the outcomes of the UAE Just Transition Work Programme established at COP28. Following COP30 in Belém, Brazil, negotiators, governments, Indigenous Peoples, civil society organizations, workers' groups, youth, and international institutions are now working towards operationalizing the newly established Just Transition Mechanism (known in civil society conversations as the Belém-Antalya Mechanism, or BAM).

Current discussions make it clear that climate action cannot stop at reducing emissions. A just transition must protect livelihoods, advance equity, uphold intergenerational justice, guarantee Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), and defend collective rights. This is especially urgent for women, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant peoples, small farmers, informal workers, and other communities already carrying the heaviest burdens of climate impacts and extractive economies. Although just transition language is increasingly present in NDCs and climate negotiations, implementation remains dangerously weak. Financing is insufficient, accountability mechanisms are limited and affected communities are still too often excluded from decisions made about their territories and futures. Without rights-based approaches, direct participation, and real resources, just transition risks becoming another political slogan when it should be a pathway to deliver justice.

Why is this important?

The gap between political commitments and real-world implementation has long been one of the greatest failures of international climate governance. Prior to COP28, just transition had no dedicated institutional home within the UNFCCC. The Work Programme established in Dubai was itself the result of years of sustained advocacy by trade unions, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, feminist movements, and civil society coalitions — yet its mandate was deliberately limited to dialogue and knowledge exchange, stopping short of generating binding commitments or driving structural change. The push to convert that dialogue into delivery was led by a broad civil society coalition, alongside the G77 and China, which on the first day of COP30 issued an early and unambiguous call for the establishment of a Just Transition Mechanism.

The decision to develop a Just Transition Mechanism was taken at COP30 in Belém. It needs to be designed to build upon and complement the Work Programme and other existing workstreams under the Convention and the Paris Agreement, while addressing structural barriers that have long constrained implementation. This includes limited institutional

arrangements, insufficient financial and technical support, inaccessible financing mechanisms, and the absence of intergenerational participation and accountability systems that recognize and uphold the rights, knowledge systems, and leadership of youth and women.

Although its operationalization remains to be defined, the decision establishing the Mechanism sets out a clear normative orientation. It is grounded in the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities, decent work, fundamental human rights, intergenerational equity, and social inclusion. The agreement also adopted some of the strongest rights-based language in UN climate negotiations, recognizing Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant communities, workers, youth, and affected territories as central actors in the transition. The Mechanism — championed by civil society as the Belém Antalya Mechanism (BAM), a name that links the cities of the two consecutive COPs where just transition gained decisive institutional ground — is expected to be designed as a constituted body under the authority and guidance of the CMA. Its purpose is to coordinate and enable just transition work within and beyond the UNFCCC through three intersecting functions: Coordination and Coherence, Action and Support, and Knowledge Building.

Central to its architecture is the imperative to strengthen equity in the deployment of just transition support, ensuring that financial mechanisms, technology transfers, and capacity-building initiatives do not deepen existing inequalities between and within countries — and that the concept itself remains grounded in inclusion, cooperation, care, human rights, gender equality, labour rights, Indigenous rights, and the rights of nature, resisting reduction to a rebranding exercise or capture by interests that would dilute its transformative purpose.

Key messages

What the Belém decision ultimately reveals is that institutionalizing just transition within the UNFCCC is not merely a technical or procedural challenge — it is a fundamentally political one. Translating normative commitments into concrete outcomes requires that governments, policymakers, and societies collectively confront deeper structural questions: how transitions are conceived, by whom, and in whose interest.

Workers, people, and communities must be at the centre of this process — not as consultation subjects, but as rights-holders guiding the direction and terms of just transition efforts. In this context, the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities are not ancillary concerns — they are foundational to any genuinely just transition. These communities have long stewarded territories now at the frontlines of both climate impacts and extraction-driven transitions, embodying forms of territorial governance and ecological knowledge. Centering these perspectives requires operationalizing Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a binding standard, recognizing self-determination in climate and extractive decision-making, and establishing dedicated funding mechanisms that support peoples-led solutions rather than subordinating them to externally defined agendas.

This implies the coordinated pursuit of food, energy, and territorial sovereignty, alongside wealth redistribution and the democratization of control over energy systems. Transition must therefore be understood as an inherently political project — one oriented toward reshaping the relationships between society, economy, and nature, and informed by critical perspectives that foreground social and environmental justice as core dimensions of any adequate response to the contemporary climate crisis.

Recommendations

1. Shift the Mechanism's design from coordination to transformation

The Mechanism should move beyond consultative participation and be explicitly designed to address power imbalances through representative, rights-based governance structures. Meaningful representation and decision-making power for Environmental NGOs, social movements, Afro-descendant peoples, Indigenous Peoples' organizations, women and gender representatives, trade unions, and youth should be guaranteed within the Mechanism's governing body (e.g. a board or executive committee), alongside clear accountability frameworks grounded in principles of social, territorial, and intergenerational justice. To ensure continuity between political commitment and implementation, a transitional committee should be established to initiate the Mechanism's work and support its operationalization pending the adoption of its final modalities, governance arrangements, and procedures.

2. Redefine finance quality, not just volume

The debate on climate finance has concentrated disproportionately on mobilization targets. What is needed is an equivalent focus on the terms, channels, and ultimate beneficiaries of finance. Grants and non-debt instruments must become the default for transition support in vulnerable contexts, and financing flows should be explicitly evaluated against their capacity to reach community-level actors — including Indigenous Peoples, youth, small farmers, Indigenous women-led initiatives and informal workers — rather than stopping at national governments or large intermediaries.

3. Close the NDC implementation gap through binding social indicators

The near-universal inclusion of just transition language in NDCs has not translated into implementation. As part of the operationalization of the Just Transition Mechanism, governments should be required to develop transition plans that identify affected groups, establish measurable social, labor, and territorial indicators, and report progress through existing transparency frameworks under the UNFCCC. The Mechanism should support accountability, monitoring, and the evaluation of whether transition policies effectively address equity, livelihoods, participation, and rights-based commitments. Just transition cannot remain a narrative complement to mitigation targets — it must become an accountable and measurable component of them.

4. Establish territorial consent as a precondition, not an afterthought

The expansion of renewable energy and critical mineral extraction into Indigenous and traditional territories represents the most acute contradiction within the current transition agenda. FPIC must not be reduced to a procedural safeguard, but recognized as a substantive veto right and an expression of Indigenous Peoples' collective right to self-determination, territorial governance, and the ability to define their own development and transition pathways. A transition that bypasses territorial consent replicates, under a green rationale, the extractive and colonial patterns of the fossil paradigm it claims to replace. Governance principles for transition minerals — including circularity, demand reduction, consent, and sovereignty — must be established as binding criteria within the BAM's framework. International financing institutions should adopt FPIC compliance as a binding eligibility criterion.

5. Integrate sovereignty dimensions into transition planning

Food, energy, and territorial sovereignty are currently treated as separate policy domains, yet their interdependence is fundamental to any credible transition framework. Just transition planning — at both national and international levels — must address them through coordinated frameworks that strengthen local economies, democratic governance over resources, and communities' capacity to define their own transition pathways. False solutions — including carbon offsets and green extractivism — must be explicitly excluded

from what counts as just transition support, as they extend rather than dismantle the logics the Mechanism is meant to supersede.

6. Address the structural architecture of climate injustice

Unilateral trade measures such as carbon border adjustment mechanisms, extractive supply chains oriented toward Global North consumption, and debt-constrained fiscal spaces in the Global South are not external obstacles but structural features of the same economic system that produces climate vulnerability in the first place. Recommendations that ignore this architecture will treat symptoms rather than causes. The BAM should become a space where these structural linkages are named, analyzed, and acted upon — ensuring that climate action does not reproduce the patterns of oppression and resource extraction that defined the fossil era. Accountability and fairness in trade measures related to just transition pathways must be part of this agenda.

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