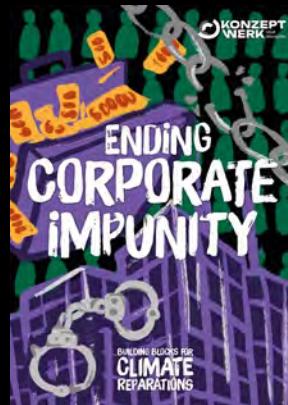


Roland Ngam

JUST TRANSITION NOW!

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR
**CLIMATE
REPARATIONS**

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CLIMATE REPARATIONS



UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS:

- climate finance,
- post-growth & decolonisation,
- how (not) to apologise.

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IMPRESSION

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CLIMATE REPARATIONS IN A NUTSHELL

WHY DO WE NEED CLIMATE REPARATIONS?

The climate crisis is profoundly unjust. It is not a crisis that affects everyone equally, nor one that everyone has caused.

⁴ On one side are those historically and structurally responsible for it : countries, corporations and individuals that have benefited – and continue to benefit – from greenhouse gas-intensive production, consumption and economic growth. Germany, for example is responsible for around 3% of global historic emissions¹, despite making up less than 1% of the world's population. It has built immense wealth and technological capacity through centuries of industrialization and colonial exploitation, and it possesses the financial means to adapt to the consequences of climate change.

On the other side are those who bear the brunt of the crisis: communities, countries, and ecosystems in the Global South that have contributed least to the problem. Cameroon, for instance has produced only about 0,2% of historic global emissions², yet faces devastating impacts – from floods and droughts to the loss of livelihoods and biodiversity – without the sufficient resources to respond or recover.

1 <https://climatechangetracker.org/nations/greenhouse-gas-emissions>
(This excludes emissions caused by goods imported to Germany.)

2 Ibid



When we talk about Climate Reparations it is essential to recognize that the injustice is not limited to unequal emissions. Germany's wealth, stability and high standard of living are inseparable from the historic and ongoing exploitation of countries like Cameroon³- through colonialism, extractivism, unfair trade relations and neocolonial economic structures. The raw materials, labour and resources extracted from colonial regions have directly fuelled Europe's industrialization and accumulation of wealth, while leaving formerly colonized nations structurally disadvantaged, indebted and dependent.

Cameroon's vulnerability to the climate crisis is, therefore, in turn, not merely the result of natural conditions. It is the outcome of historically produced inequalities – the result of centuries of dispossession, resource extraction and deliberate underdevelopment. The same systems that caused the climate crisis continues to shape who suffers from it and who profits from it.

The line between those who suffer from the climate crisis does not run only between rich and poor countries. It also runs within societies, along class divisions, gender hierarchies, racialized structures and other intersecting forms of oppression. Marginalized groups – including women, Indigenous peoples, Black and other racialized communities, people with disabilities, and low income households – are often both the least responsible for emissions and the most exposed to climate harms.

³ In this case there is even a direct connection since Cameroon used to be a German Colony. For more information on the relationship of the two countries through a climate justice lens see: www.knoe.org/thedamagedone

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CLIMATE REPARATIONS

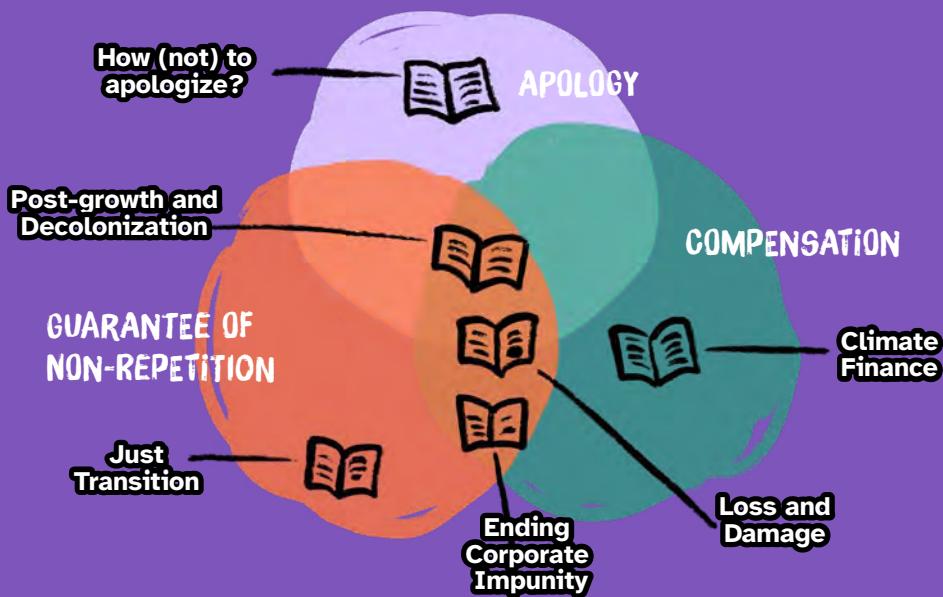
Climate reparations are therefore neither charity nor aid, they are

- necessary to stop further injustices and ensure accountability and repair by redistributing resources, power and decision making to those most affected,
- a tool to address the root causes of the crisis – historical responsibility, structural inequality and systemic exploitation.,
- the centrepiece of climate and global justice, a prerequisite for a healing process between the Global South and North.

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According to Maxine Burkett⁴, climate reparations must at least include three core elements: “an apology, compensation and a guarantee of non-repetition”. An apology acknowledges the harm done and accepts responsibility for it. Compensation - whether monetary or through other forms of material redress - gives tangible or symbolic weight to that acknowledgement. The guarantee of non-repetition, perhaps the most transformative element, commits the perpetrating parties to structural changes that prevent the continuation or repetition of the injustice.

To make these elements more concrete, we identified 6 building blocks for climate reparations that explain how these could look like in practice, in Germany and beyond (see figure).



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Looking at the current state of civil society, we believe that climate reparations are the missing link in a comprehensive understanding of climate justice. Despite growing awareness of the connection between the climate crisis, colonialism and racism, the concept of climate reparations remains underexplored and often misunderstood. One major reason is the lack of accessible materials on the topic - particularly in German-speaking contexts.

With our project “Building Blocks for Climate Reparations,” we aim to close this gap – by providing accessible, grounded knowledge that links climate reparations to justice, responsibility and systemic change.

ABOUT THIS FACTSHEET

This factsheet traces the origins of just transition from labor struggles to climate negotiations and situates it within climate reparations. It links historical and ongoing colonial extraction, inequality, and corporate abuse to today's transition debates, highlighting Germany's responsibility and the central role of Global South communities in reshaping the global political economy. It is authored by Roland Ngam, project manager for climate justice and socio-ecological transformation with the Rosa Luxemburg-Foundation in Johannesburg. His main interests include postgrowth futures, indigenous knowledge studies, philosophy and art.



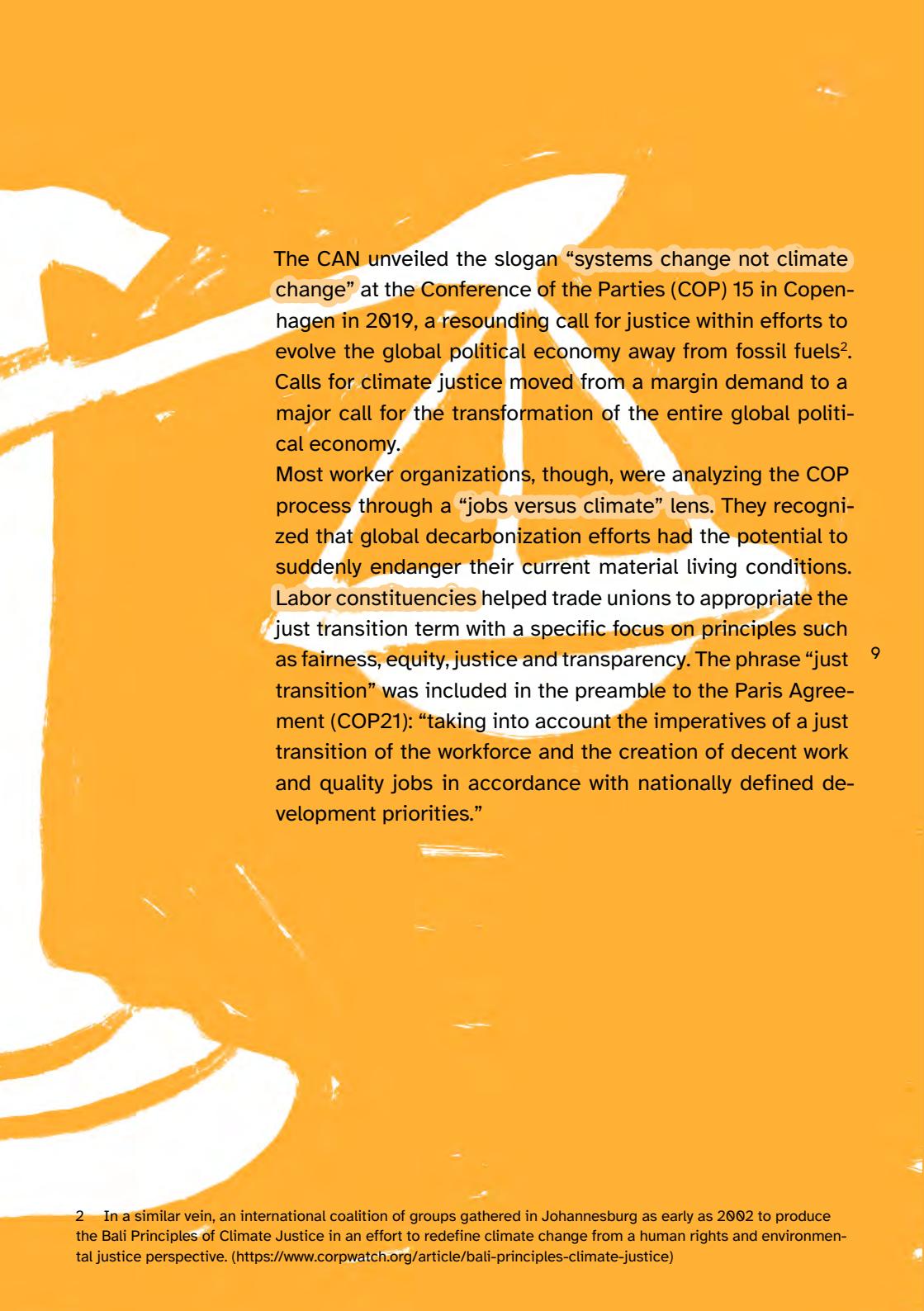
THE TERM “JUSTICE” IN CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS – BACKGROUND AND ORIGINS

The term “just transition” emerged in the 1970s within the labor environmentalist movement among North American workers.¹ Rising cases of water and air pollution, caused by market capitalism merging with financial capitalism squeezed an ever increasing share of surpluses out of investments, naturally, at the expense of safety standards. The resulting struggles of laborers and low-wage workers, a majority of whom were Black or Latino, were falsely framed as environmental justice. In this sense, the first iteration of just transition was to protect the health and wellbeing of workers.

In 1988, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) announced plans to create the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a body that would publish scientific assessments of climate change, its potential risks and impacts to the world and show how to mitigate its worst effects.

⁸ This announcement motivated numerous organizations to meet at the World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere with the ambition of ensuring that ordinary people’s demands and viewpoints would be included in the IPCC’s agenda. A year later, these organizations created a network to coordinate collaboration and policy positions: the Climate Action Network (CAN). Their efforts for a common voice were further strengthened when the United Nations General Assembly created the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1990.

¹ Abram, S. et al (2022) Just Transition: A whole-systems approach to decarbonisation, *Climate Policy*, 22(8), pp. 1033-1049. doi: 10.1080/14693062.2022.2108365.



The CAN unveiled the slogan “systems change not climate change” at the Conference of the Parties (COP) 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, a resounding call for justice within efforts to evolve the global political economy away from fossil fuels². Calls for climate justice moved from a margin demand to a major call for the transformation of the entire global political economy.

Most worker organizations, though, were analyzing the COP process through a “jobs versus climate” lens. They recognized that global decarbonization efforts had the potential to suddenly endanger their current material living conditions. Labor constituencies helped trade unions to appropriate the just transition term with a specific focus on principles such as fairness, equity, justice and transparency. The phrase “just transition” was included in the preamble to the Paris Agreement (COP21): “taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities.”

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² In a similar vein, an international coalition of groups gathered in Johannesburg as early as 2002 to produce the Bali Principles of Climate Justice in an effort to redefine climate change from a human rights and environmental justice perspective. (<https://www.corpwatch.org/article/bali-principles-climate-justice>)

DEFINITION

As the previous explanations show, “just transition” is a contested term.

International Labour Organization (ILO 2015)

“...GREENING THE ECONOMY IN A WAY THAT IS AS FAIR AND INCLUSIVE AS POSSIBLE TO EVERYONE CONCERNED, CREATING DECENT WORK OPPORTUNITIES AND LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND”.

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

“...A SECTOR, REGION OR ECONOMY-WIDE PROCESS THAT PRODUCES THE PLANS, POLICIES AND INVESTMENTS SO THAT:

¹⁰

- EVERYONE HAS SOCIAL PROTECTION;
- ALL JOBS ARE DECENT;
- EMISSIONS ARE LOW OR AT ZERO;
- POVERTY IS ELIMINATED; AND
- COMMUNITIES ARE THRIVING AND RESILIENT.”

They add:

“JUST TRANSITION INCLUDES BOTH MEASURES TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF JOB AND LIVELIHOOD LOSSES AND INDUSTRY PHASE-OUT ON WORKERS AND COMMUNITIES, AND MEASURES TO PRODUCE NEW, LOW EMISSIONS AND DECENT JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS AS WELL AS HEALTHY COMMUNITIES.”

These definitions all have a focus on protecting workers' rights within the flood of reforms that are expected to occur as the global political economy decarbonizes.



JUST TRANSITION



At the same time, there is also a growing concern to include communities and people who form part of the system that workers also depend on.

South Africa's National Planning Commission:

“...A RANGE OF SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS NEEDED TO SECURE WORKERS’ JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS WHEN ECONOMIES ARE SHIFTING TO SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION, INCLUDING AVOIDING CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY, AMONG OTHER CHALLENGES.”³

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United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change:

“...MANAGING THE SHIFT TO A LOW-CARBON ECONOMY IN A WAY THAT IS FAIR AND INCLUSIVE, ENSURING THAT NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.”⁴



³ National Planning Commission of South Africa (2019). Social Partner Dialogue for a Just Transition; May 2018 – June 2019. Pretoria: NPC.

⁴ UNFCCC (2023). Implementation of Just Transition and Economic Diversification Strategies; a compilation of best practices from different countries. Bonn: UNFCCC.

Two overarching statements can be made regarding definitions of “just transition(s).”

Firstly, whereas workplace and industrial transitions are often defined and sometimes undermined by capital's profit motive, a just transition as conceptualized by trade unions and international processes like COP is driven by reforming the capital/labor relationship in a manner that protects workers.⁵ In this regard, we have seen cases of trade unions pushing back against just transition initiatives. A striking example is the energy sector workers in South Africa and many other countries opposing the closure of coal-fired power stations. These workers view decarbonization today in terms of risks to their mortgage, pension funds and even survival.⁶

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Secondly, the idea of reparative or restorative justice does not seem to be the immediate priority of either COP or trade union just transition efforts. Rather, current initiatives have a heavy forward-looking slant, with procedural or distributive justice the immediate or most urgent focus. This is where a great division appears between workers and

NGOs not directly tied to trade unions. The latter typically have a broader view of what a just transition should look like, as embodied in the *Cochabamba moment*.⁷ For communities and taxpayers that host firms, efforts to transition to low-carbon economies must address injustices of the past as well as structural injustices within prevailing socio-economic institutions in order to achieve a political economy that is fair for all. Accordingly, the activism of this more diverse and more vocal NGO constituency seeks to answer questions such as: Why is there climate injustice? Who are the perpetrators and who are the victims? How does one ensure reparation and restoration during either the active life of the firm or when it has completed its activities? Can or should a reformed firm just move on as if all the sins of the past had been forgiven? What should be done so that cases of wrongdoing do not happen again? How do we provide justice to those who have been wronged? How do we define justiciability⁸ of socioecological crimes?

5 Harry, JH, Maltby T & Szulecki, K (2024). Contesting just transitions: Climate delay and the contradictions of labour environmentalism. *Political Geography*, Vol. 112, 103114, 2024, pp. 103113

6 Although there has been significant fear mongering by politicians around just transition issues, the International Energy Agency posits that just and inclusive energy transitions are expected to create more jobs than currently exist in the power sector

7 In 2010, former Bolivian President Evo Morales convened the World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (the People's Summit) in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The Cochabamba moment had a dramatic impact in galvanizing developing countries around a set of key demands: creation of a climate justice tribunal, compensation of developing countries for climate debt (reparations essentially), debt cancellation and a universal declaration of Mother Earth's rights.

8 Justiciability concerns the limits upon legal issues over which a court can exercise its judicial authority.

PERVASIVE HISTORICAL AND RECENT ABUSES

CONNECTING JUST TRANSITION AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

The Cochabamba People's Agreement reminded the world that the Global North has been siphoning natural resources and free labor from the Global South for centuries. In this sense, the Global North is the main driver of unjust transitions, climate injustice and climate change⁹.

Thomas Piketty notes in *A Brief History of Equality* that a study of evolution of the differences in wealth between countries show two key periods of great divergence: 1820–1950 and then 1950–1980.¹⁰

The first period, i.e. the Industrial Revolution, drove significant changes to global sociocultural and industrial processes, the consequence of which was widespread dispossession in the Global South. The expansionist ambitions of empires unilaterally shifted Europe's borders to the ends of the earth. The English/British coined the phrase: "the sun never sets on the British empire" to explain the sheer size of their empire. The outer reaches of empire, though the object of scorn and mockery, were re-engineered to serve the interests of the global core.

The kind of Prometheus unleashed by the invention of steam manufacturing processes was mercantile capitalism, a god of fire that devoured unlimited amounts of raw material and labor. It required vast coalfields to be excavated, expansive monocrop plantations to be sown and abundant labor to be provided.¹¹ Importantly too, within mass consciousness, it raised man from just another living organism in the biocene to the destructive anthropocentric top of the food chain and the biocene became the Anthropicene.

⁹ Ngam, R (2025). Degrowth in an African periphery: from necrocapitalism to a pluriverse of nowtopias. In Nelson, A & Liegey, V (eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Degrowth*. Oxfordshire: Routledge – Taylor & Francis.

¹⁰ Piketty, T (2022). *A Brief History of Equality*. Cambridge and London: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

¹¹ In the Belgian Congo, the pace of production was so frenetic that enforcers would chop off the hands or hack down the relatives of laborers who failed to meet their daily quota.

During the second period from 1950–1980, after the Second World War, a period that in fact starts with industrial capitalism and eventually merges with financial and technology/technological capitalism, we witnessed hyper-anthropocentric Prometheanism, the fusion of land, labor, capital and—more recently—information and communication technology combined with artificial intelligence. The plunder of nature, the destruction of virgin forests, and the pollution of waterways has become normalized by the masters of industry who supply supermarkets, jewelry stores, fashion outlets, transport systems, data centers and an endless array of applications on our mobile phones. Ac-

cording to the World Inequality Report, the top 10% richest people on the planet own over 76% of the wealth.¹² The rich are the biggest consumers of water, fashion, jewelry, cars, flights and beef, i.e. super emitters of CO₂. This group is responsible for over 50% of all CO₂ emissions. The bottom 50% live under precarious conditions in the most dangerous parts of the globe. The poorest people own barely 8.5% of the wealth and account for just over 12% of CO₂ emissions. Many of them slave away under inhumane conditions to produce cheap grain, cheap fashion, cheap beef and cheap electronics for the Global North.

With its wealth, power and position, the Global North is also systematically appropriating the Global South's resources.

¹⁴ Like Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah said at the founding of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963,

“FOR CENTURIES AFRICA HAS BEEN THE [MILK COW] OF THE WESTERN WORLD; IT WAS OUR CONTINENT THAT HELPED THE WESTERN WORLD BUILT UP ITS ACCUMULATED WEALTH.”

Kwame Nkrumah



The endless oil spills, abuses and corruption around major oil and gas projects in Africa are well known. They have been going on for decades. Dispossession of ancestral lands is widespread and the modus operandi for clearing these territories are always the same:

Government officials in faraway capital cities use eminent domain laws to push indigenous communities off their lands so that extraction projects by faraway Global North companies can proceed. When local communities protest their government's heavy-handedness or the lack of fair compensation, the army and police riot squads are brought in to beat people into submission.

The Global South is also the dumping ground of the Global North. Because the Global North is producing waste much faster than its dumpsites can handle, it is exporting much of it to other countries. China used to buy some of it to fuel its power stations. However, it is taking less of it as its economy grows. Other countries, like Ghana, receive tons of electronic waste that desperate unemployed youth strip down in places like Agbogbloshie to recover valuable components like copper and gold. Obviously, the rudimentary methods that they use cause serious mercury and arsenic pollution in water systems. Much like Ghana, many other African countries are paying a heavy price for taking the Global North's junk (used cars, clothes, electronics, etc.).

GERMANY'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Analyses on historical and contemporary CO₂ emissions show that Germany is responsible for about 3% of the 2.5 trillion tons of CO₂ that have been released into the atmosphere since 1850.¹⁴

It is the **sixth largest historical emitter of CO₂**. Shortly after unification, Prussia, which would later become Germany, played a significant role in spreading steam technologies as well as in laying claim to the human and environmental resources of the Global South, notably through the **1884–1885**

¹⁶ **Berlin conference** and its colonial possessions, events that significantly ramped up climate injustice and CO₂ release. Germany's political reunification and railway lines gave it the leverage it needed to build heavy industrial and manufacturing capacity around the country.

By 1900, Germany was the largest economy in Europe and a leading producer of steel, railway equipment, cars and chemicals.

GERMANY'S RISE WAS AIDED, OF COURSE, BY ABUNDANT SUPPLIES OF COAL AND LIGNITE AS WELL AS COLONIAL TERRITORIES THAT SUPPLIED ITS MANUFACTURING PROCESSES AND ITS URBAN CENTERS WITH PRIMARY COMMODITIES.

Driven by grand empire ambitions to conquer what was regarded as **terra nullius** and **savage lands**, Germany laid claim to present day Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, Togo and Rwanda in Africa.



In Cameroon, German interests expropriated 264,000 hectares of the most fertile lands around Mount Cameroon. This part of the greater Congo Basin Rain forest was cleared to grow banana, rubber, coffee, tea and other tropical crops. Cleared areas lost insect colonies, animals and plant species.

Forced labor was used in the plantation and desertion was punished by flogging, hanging, rape and even drowning of deserters' babies by commanders like Freiherr von Soden, Jesko von Puttkammer and Hans Dominik. In one case, the brutality of which would be reported to the German parliament, Hans Dominik put over thirty Bakoko babies in baskets and drowned them in a river.

¹⁷

Between 1850 and 1970, Germany was consistently among the top three biggest emitters of CO₂ in the world, along with the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Although it has made efforts to decarbonize its economy (Germany currently emits less CO₂ than the USA, China, India, Japan, Russia, Brazil and Indonesia), Germany is still the biggest emitter of CO₂ in Europe. It generated almost 824 million tons of CO₂ eq in 2023, or a per capita average of 8.⁹ tons of CO₂ eq, more than twice as much as the next highest country, France.¹⁵ Its biggest sources of energy are still oil, gas and coal¹⁶ while its dependence on gas has contributed to new investments in oil and gas exploration in the Global South in the 2020s, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

15 www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/greenhouse-gases-viewer-data-viewers

16 ag-energiebilanzen.de/wp-content/uploads/EBD24p2_Auswertungstabellen_deutsch.pdf

HOW AND WHERE JUST TRANSITION NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Environmental pollution does not respect international borders. Pollution in one country becomes a burden for the entire planet. The planet has a CO₂ credit which must be used by the entire globe. The irresponsible behavior of some, allied with the delusion of those who trust in the unproven ability of the planet to keep healing itself, means that we are burning through this credit very quickly. Thus, it will also take a global effort to resolve the world's transition efforts.

That said, some people and nations must bear a bigger burden of the urgent fixes that need to be made. The G20 economies, for example, are the biggest historical emitters of an-

¹⁸thropogenic CO₂ since 1850. Within that group, the G7 group of countries (i.e. the US, Canada, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and Japan) plus China have an even bigger responsibility for historic anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. The consensus on the most efficient way to solve climate change is to implement the Paris Agreement's goal of keeping global warming at 1.5 degrees, and if that fails, 2 degrees relative to preindustrial levels. In order to achieve this, nations have to pursue a common but differentiated approach to reducing their CO₂ emissions, which they have to report in their **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**. Common but differentiated approaches mean that the biggest polluters must declare the biggest NDCs.

This means that countries with a large carbon footprint, concrete urban sprawl, large-scale commercial farms, steel plants, data centers and fossil fuel consumption must bear the biggest burden of cuts. They should also transfer sustainable technology and resources to victims of historic pollution. Unfortunately, international processes remain too vague and, once again, Global North countries are shifting most of the responsibility to poorer nations through off-setting mechanisms.¹⁷

Poorer nations also need to transition to cleaner energy sources. They must also adapt to the adverse effects of climate change.

Unfortunately, because the biggest emitters of CO₂ are constantly kicking the can down the road, the countries that have been victims of colonialism and neocolonialism for centuries now have to shift significant portions of their national budgets to acquire renewable energy sources and adapt to climate change.

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These unjust transitions imposed on them by rich nations cannot continue if these countries still have the objective to win other battles like ending hunger, achieving universal access to education, connecting homes to pipe-borne water and electricity, and providing quality roads and homes. That is why we need just transitions.

¹⁷ Carbon offsetting is the idea that companies, countries and individuals can offset the emissions they cause. This is done through projects that save or remove emissions from the atmosphere, such as forest protection or re-forestation projects." (www.brennpunkt.lu/en/glossary-of-climate-justice-terms/)

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO ACCELERATE JUST TRANSITION

The entire planet needs to accelerate the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Implementation of regional NDCs is already happening. The EU for example has adopted the Fit for 55 climate plan that proposes to cut the region's emissions to 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. The African Union has organized two Africa Climate Summits to make the case for debt cancellation, access to more financing, technology transfer and collaboration around green technologies.

A necessary precondition for global action is having multilateral institutions that work.

A just transition cannot occur within an international space
20 in which multilateral processes do not work. Without this sine qua non, every international process is doomed to nihilism and political determinism. If and when we engineer global institutions to play their proper roles again, we must also include the following key fixes:

- Firstly, although a coalition of Global North countries have launched a series of JETPs (South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam, Senegal) the reality is that these deals are still rooted in asymmetric relationships of exploitation and indebtedness. Without large transfers of money and resources from the Global North to the Global South, no real transition is going to take place. In the case of Senegal for example, which is an unusual place for such a relationship to exist, the decision to sign the partnership cannot be divorced from Senegal's discovery of oil and gas on its offshore. In South Africa, the JETP are mostly based on loans. Tying a country into heavy long-term loans cannot be deemed as "just." It is predation.

- Secondly, through no fault of their own, most people in the Global South were placed within national borders they did not choose, under leaders they've mostly never voted for and find themselves producing commodities whose value chains were developed by colonizers. In other words, they exist only to produce commodities they do not need in their local contexts. In some cases (Kenya, South Africa, Namibia) the best land is still owned by settler colonists. A disturbing fact that continues to play out in Africa and similar plantation economies dominated by large-scale commercial farms is the sale, by European companies, of dangerous pesticides in Africa that are already banned in Europe. A just agricultural transition cannot occur when such blatant double standards are allowed to continue¹⁸.
- Thirdly, unprecedented levels of consumption in the modern era must end. Everything has a cost. The biggest sources of CO₂ are directly related to how we eat, live and travel. Our addiction to cheap meat, cheap food, cheap electronics, cheap throwaway fashion, etc. has real and dangerous consequences. Online businesses have exponentially increased both the amount of waste we produce and the energy consumption we need to be online for many hours a day. We need to transition the global political economy towards a new way of living and consuming. Connected to this, short logistics chains are important for a just transition and therefore globalization with its massive expansion of freight transport must change. Africa, for example, cannot continue importing huge amounts of cheap goods and electronics from China that it can produce closer to home. The same goes for other continents. Currently the floodgates cannot be closed due to unsuitable international governance mechanisms. There is an urgent need to renegotiate current trade regimes.

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¹⁸ The booklet Double Standards and Hazardous Pesticides compiled by Peter Clausing et al (2021) provided an overview of “pesticide active ingredients that are developed and/or brought to market by Bayer or BASF and that are still traded across globe—even though they cannot be sold in the EU and are classified as being highly hazardous to the health of humans.”

ACTIVE AFRICAN VOICES

Although more attention is given to the subject in the post-2000s, the struggle for a clean environment is an existential challenge that many African groups have been contending with for decades, sometimes at significant risk to members' lives. Asserting the right to a clean environment is often a lonely battle, and the local government, in partnership with the foreign investor, inevitably chooses to steamroll local communities.¹⁹

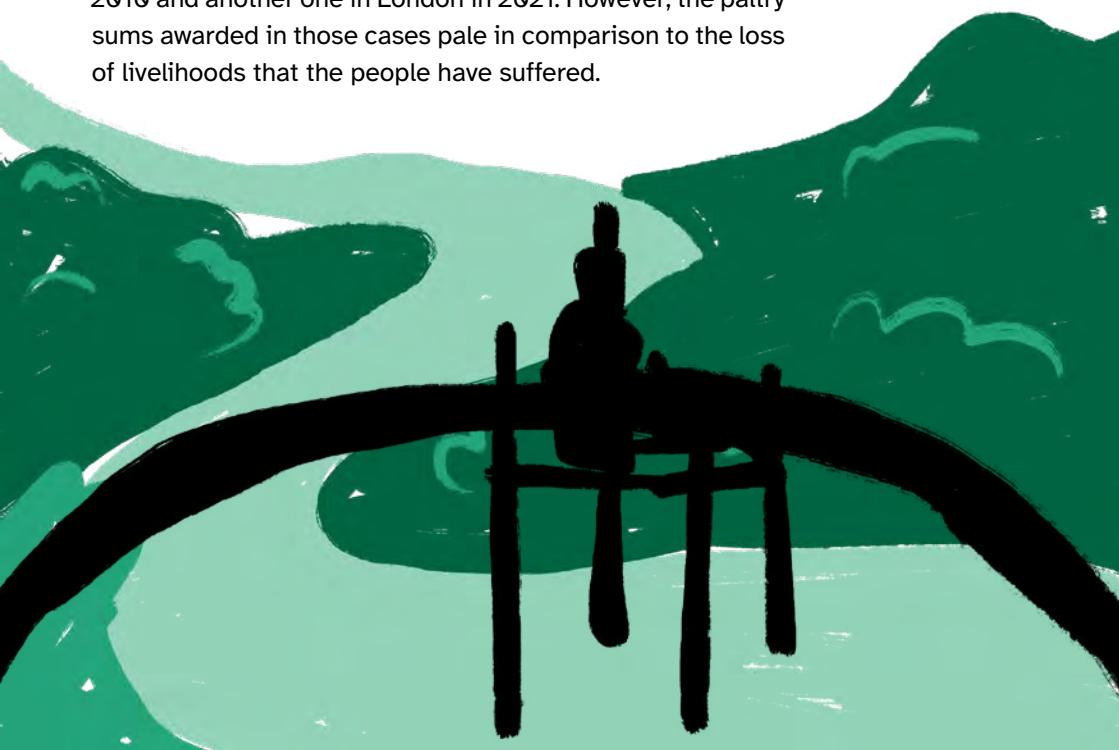
From a historical perspective, arguably the biggest voice for climate justice in Africa's modern history is the former President **Thomas Sankara**. A native of Burkina Faso, Sankara

²² saw first-hand a number of existential challenges: rising temperatures and droughts, drying soils from decades of cotton production for the Global North, the encroaching Sahara desert, irresponsible chopping down of trees by Burkinabè and austerity measures from Bretton Woods Institutions. Faced with the difficulty of getting fair loans from international financial institutions, he successfully encouraged his people to become self-sufficient in food production while also leading campaigns to plant millions of trees.



¹⁹ One can cite for example the Endorois community in Central Kenya that was evicted from their ancestral lands by the Kenyan government in the 1970s in order to set up lucrative game farms and tourism opportunities – lucrative for others and not the local community. The Endorois exhausted recourse avenues in Kenya and took the matter to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights which ruled in their favour.

The Niger Delta is also an important example to cite in this context. The oil-rich area is home to many oil giants like BP and Shell that have pumped oil out for decades. While these industry giants and their shareholders have profited significantly from the delta's oil, its people have experienced a very bitter harvest: polluted farmlands, polluted sea front, thousands of oil-spills, brutalization of community members resisting expropriation and even exclusion from political affairs. When Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa founded the non-violent Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) to protest environmental damage and abuses linked to oil extraction by Royal Dutch Shell, the reaction of the Abacha regime was heavy-handed. Ken Saro Wiwa and the rest of the Ogoni Nine were hanged on 10 November 1995. That did not kill the fight, though. Activists like Nnimmo Bassey who founded the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) keep the spotlight firmly focused on of pollution in the Niger Delta and others still fight to get justice for the people of the Niger Delta. They have won a couple of significant victories, notably a 100 million USD settlement in the Netherlands in 2010 and another one in London in 2021. However, the paltry sums awarded in those cases pale in comparison to the loss of livelihoods that the people have suffered.



Shell is now currently divesting of its interest in countries like Nigeria and South Africa.

The company cannot be allowed to exit those countries without proper reparations for the decades of destruction that it has caused.

An international group of NGOs and activists known as **OIL-WATCH** is fighting to ensure that this happens.

In Kenya, **Wangari Maathai** founded the **Green Belt Movement (GBM)** in 1977 to empower women whose livelihoods were threatened by climate change. She launched initiatives giving them more say in political affairs such as secure and better control of water, a sure way to a more comfortable life. The **Pan African Climate Justice Alliance**, also based in Kenya, is an umbrella organization that brings together over 1000 organizations from 51 countries. Although it claims to be the voice of grassroots organizations on the ground, it is more visible at UN and African Union gatherings.





Many African countries are already witnessing up to 2 degrees increases in temperatures. They are also being hit hard by a rapid succession of extreme weather events. Between 2023 and 2025, flash floods displaced over 500,000 people in Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria and Niger. Further south, Senegal's coastlines are being hit hard by coastal erosion and salinization. In one community of Dakar, i.e. Bargny, people have moved houses twice in the last fifteen years. Ndeye Yacine, a community activist from the area, has been crisscrossing Senegal and other countries to highlight the hardship of communities that have lost their homes and burial grounds to the sea.

Another community member, Fadel Wade who founded the organization Solidarite Ci Sutura in 2020, has been to every COP conference since 2021 to demand loss and damage for the large-scale destruction that coastal erosion has wrought on his community.

“THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE JUMPING INTO CANOES TO SAIL UP TO EUROPE AND THE LOSS OF LIVELIHOODS IN OUR COMMUNITIES. [...]”

“THE SUREST WAY TO END THESE DANGEROUS MIGRATIONS IS FOR THE COUNTRIES THAT ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS CHAOS TO PAY LOSS AND DAMAGE REPARATIONS SO THAT WE CAN REBUILD OUR COMMUNITIES.”

Fadel Wade

WHAT ALLIES CAN DO RIGHT NOW

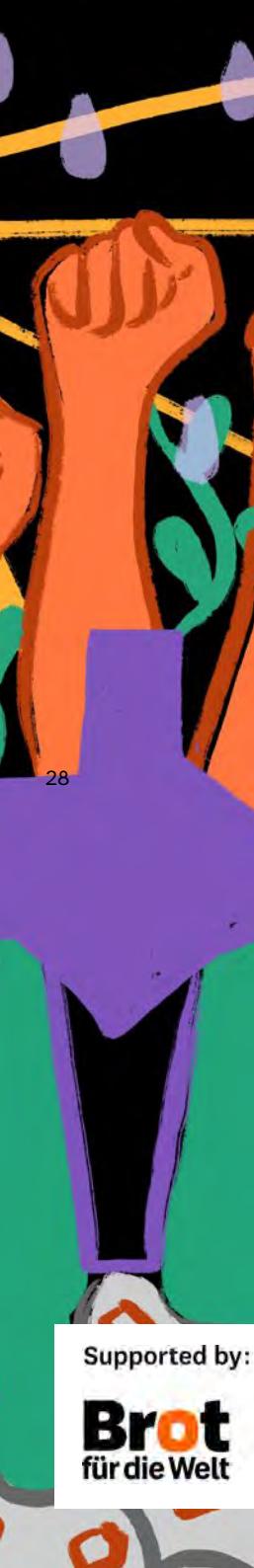
IN GERMANY AND THE REST OF THE GLOBAL NORTH

Among many others, Global South groups and activists such as:

- the South African NGOs Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC) → (CRAAD-OI)
- WOMIN → Nigeria's Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF)
- the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) → Namibia's Women's Leadership Centre
- Earthlife → the Senegalese National Platform for Climate Justice (PNAJC)
- Fossil Free South Africa → Justiça Ambiental! (JA!)
- Research and Support Centre for Development Alternatives–Indian Ocean → J4CHANGE inMozambique

have been shining the light on toxic behavior of Global North corporations in Africa. Sadly, when activists take their grievances to Europe and elsewhere, it is typically at side events in forums like COP, or at sessions organized by NGOs, university exchange programs and other gatherings of that nature.

- Global North organizations need to **shine the spotlight on the toxic legacy of widespread and continued pollution in the Global South by Global North corporations.**
- Secondly, corporations only pay attention when something threatens their bottom line and that is where partnerships need to focus. Global North allies should **co-sponsor** the growing list of **class action lawsuits** that a miscellaneous group of Global South entities are filing against rogue corporations like Shell, BP, Agip and others who continue to release high amounts of CO₂ and toxic chemicals in their land, water and air. Communities like the Niger Delta have traditionally had shockingly little support from environmental groups in the Global North. Inviting activists to events and attending sessions is important but support also needs to translate to active financial and material support to hire lawyers and other stakeholders who can bring serial polluters to account.
- Finally, a just transition cannot happen in Africa unless there is quality universal basic infrastructure in place. Africa is a continent of young people and its people require electricity, roads, bandwidth, hospitals, schools and green mass transit systems. The countries and corporations that imposed bifurcated colonial systems that worked for colonial and western interests to the detriment of local populations should pay reparations in the form of basic infrastructure. In this sense, proper reparations can only work through **nation-to-community and community-to-community projects**. They cannot go to the same African comprador capitalist class that has allied with colonial systems to such devastating effect over the past century.



ORGANISE REPAIR TRANSFORM

Poorer nations also need to transition to cleaner energy sources. They must also adapt to the adverse effects of climate change. Unfortunately, because the biggest emitters of CO₂ are constantly kicking the can down the road, the countries that have been victims of colonialism and neocolonialism for centuries now have to shift significant portions of their national budgets to acquire renewable energy sources and adapt to climate change. These unjust transitions imposed on them by rich nations cannot continue if these countries still have the objective to win other battles like ending hunger, achieving universal access to education, connecting homes to pipe-borne water and electricity, and providing quality roads and homes. That is why we need just transitions.

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