

Justice in Energy Transition: Ensuring Inclusion, Participation, Benefit-Sharing, Peace and Ubuntu in Africa

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Abstract

This paper explores how justice, equity and fairness can be achieved in energy transition in Africa. The paper observes that energy transition has become a key continental priority towards enhancing universal access to modern, reliable, clean, affordable and sustainable energy in Africa. The paper notes that Africa has immense potential to fast-track and achieve energy transition due to abundance of renewable sources of energy in the continent and critical minerals needed to support renewable energy developments. However, despite its potential to be a global leader in energy transition, the paper observes that the shift to renewable energy is also fuelling injustices and inequalities in Africa with negative impacts on people and planet. Consequently, the paper posits that it is imperative to promote justice in energy transition in Africa for people and planet. The paper suggests how this ideal can be achieved by ensuring inclusion, participation, benefit-sharing, peace and Ubuntu.

1.0 Introduction

Energy is a driving force of the modern global economy. Energy supports virtually all human activities including cooking, heating, lighting, education, healthcare, agriculture and food production, mining, transport, and industrialization¹. Energy is therefore an essential resource and commodity that enables socio-economic development. Modern energy services have been described as a powerful engine of economic and social development². Consequently, it has been observed that no country has been able to develop much beyond a subsistence economy without enhancing access to energy services for a broad section of its population³. Energy can support global progress towards Sustainable Development since modern, reliable, affordable and sustainable energy services can unlock most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through poverty eradication, advancements in health, education, food production, water supply and industrialization, and tackling global challenges such as climate change⁴.

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¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations., 'Energy in the World Economy' Available at <https://www.fao.org/4/x8054e/x8054e04.htm> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Energy and the Sustainable Development Goals., Available at https://energypedia.info/wiki/Energy_and_the_Sustainable_Development_Goals (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

However, the global energy sector also raises key environmental, social and economic concerns. For example, most of the global energy is derived from fossil fuels including coal, oil and natural gas⁵. However, despite their importance in global energy security, fossil fuels are also negatively impacting people and planet. For example, fossil fuels are by far the largest contributor to climate change since they account for most of the global greenhouse gas emissions⁶. In addition, fossil fuels contribute to air pollution with severe impacts on human and ecosystem health disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups including the poor and people and communities in developing countries⁷. Further, since oil, gas and coal are non-renewable, they can be depleted and therefore, placing too much reliance on them can affect global energy security and supply with severe impacts on socio-economic development⁸.

In light of the negative impacts of fossil fuels, it has become necessary to shift the global energy sector from its dependence on fossil fuels to renewable, clean and sustainable sources of energy. Energy transition has become a global priority that seeks to promote the shift from fossil fuel-based systems of energy production and consumption to renewable energy sources of energy for environmental, social and economic benefits⁹. It has been observed that energy transition is gaining traction all over the world with wind, solar, hydro and geothermal among other renewable energy sources being widely adopted¹⁰. However, due to unsustainable practices, the energy transition is also negatively impacting people and planet¹¹. Consequently, there is need to ensure justice, fairness and equity in energy transition for sustainable outcomes for both people and planet.

This paper explores how justice, equity and fairness can be achieved in energy transition in Africa. The paper observes that energy transition has become a key continental priority towards enhancing universal access to modern, reliable, clean, affordable and sustainable energy in Africa. The paper notes that Africa has immense potential to fast-track and achieve energy transition due to abundance of renewable sources of energy in the continent and critical minerals needed to

⁵ United Nations Development Programme., 'What is the sustainable energy transition and why is it key to tackling climate change?' Available at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-sustainable-energy-transition-and-why-it-key-tackling-climate-change> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

⁶ United Nations., 'Causes and Effects of Climate Change' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

⁷ Solomon. B., & Krishna. K., 'The Coming Sustainable Energy Transition: History, Strategies, and Outlook.' *Energy Policy* 39 (2011) 7422-7431

⁸ Ibid

⁹ S & P Global., 'What is Energy Transition?' Available at <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/articles/what-is-energy-transition> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹⁰ United Nations., 'Renewable Energy - Powering a Safer Future' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/raising-ambition/renewable-energy> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹¹ The Role of Fossil Fuel and Renewable Energy Projects in Conflict Across Africa., Available at <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-role-of-fossil-fuel-and-renewable-energy-projects-in-conflict-across-africa/> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

support renewable energy developments. However, despite its potential to be a global leader in energy transition, the paper observes that the shift to renewable energy is also fuelling injustices and inequalities in Africa with negative impacts on people and planet. Consequently, the paper posits that it is imperative to promote justice in energy transition in Africa for people and planet. The paper suggests how this ideal can be achieved by ensuring inclusion, participation, benefit-sharing, peace and *Ubuntu*.

2.0 Energy Transition in Africa: Progress and Challenges

Energy transition has become a key agenda in the 21st century in pursuit of human and environmental development goals. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), global energy transition provides a solution towards reducing reliance on fossil fuels by shifting to sustainable, clean, affordable and reliable energy for people and planet¹². In addition, the International Energy Agency (IEA) notes that energy transition offers the chance to build a safer, resilient and sustainable global energy system that ensures environmental sustainability, reduces exposure to fuel price volatility, and enhances access to affordable energy¹³. Energy transition is an essential process towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions, combating climate change and air pollution, fostering global energy security, and creating a sustainable energy system that maximizes benefits for both people and planet¹⁴. Achieving energy transition is therefore vital towards building a global energy system that is environmentally friendly, reliable, affordable, resilient and fair for all¹⁵.

In particular, energy transition is a fundamental agenda for Africa. It has been observed that Africa faces a significant energy access deficit with millions of people in the continent lacking access to clean, reliable, safe, and affordable sources of energy¹⁶. Africa accounts for majority of the world's population without access to electricity and clean sources of cooking¹⁷. It has been observed that millions of people all over the world lack access to electricity with many more others relying on biomass fuels such as charcoal, coal and animal waste for cooking¹⁸. This

¹² United Nations Environment Programme., 'Energy' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/energy> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹³ International Energy Agency., 'Energy security in energy transitions' Available at <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2022/energy-security-in-energy-transitions> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹⁴ What is the Energy Transition?., Available at <https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/news/blog/what-energy-transition> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ International Renewable Energy Agency., 'The energy transition in Africa: Opportunities for international collaboration with a focus on the G7' Available at <https://www.irena.org/Publications/2024/Apr/The-energy-transition-in-Africa-Opportunities-for-international-collaboration-with-a-focus-on-the-G7> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹⁷ World Bank Group., 'Energy Access in Eastern and Southern Africa' Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/brief/afe-energy> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

¹⁸ Sustainable Energy for All., 'SDG 7.1 - Access to energy' Available at <https://www.seforall.org/goal-7-targets/access> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

situation has grave impacts on people and planet since it leads to deforestation, destruction of habitats and biodiversity loss as people search for tradition fuels while also causing thousands of deaths associated with indoor pollution¹⁹.

Transitioning to renewable energy is therefore vital for Sustainable Development in Africa. By shifting from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy, Africa can create new jobs, accelerate economic growth, unlock social and health benefits while also strengthening the continent's response to climate change²⁰. Africa's development blueprint, *Agenda 2063*²¹, acknowledges that energy transition is a fundamental objective for human progress and environmental sustainability in the continent. Agenda 2063 portrays the vision of a Continent where renewable energy including wind, solar, hydro, bioenergy, ocean tidal waves, geothermal and other renewables claim more than half of the energy consumption for households, businesses and organizations in Africa²².

Africa has immense potential to fast-track energy transition for people and planet. For example, Agenda 2063 notes that Africa is endowed with renewable sources of energy with wind, solar, hydro, bioenergy, ocean tidal waves, geothermal among other renewables being abundant all over the continent²³. With a growing energy demand driven by rapid population growth, industrialization, socio-economic investments, and rising standards of living, renewable sources of energy are poised to play a key role in meeting Africa's growing energy needs²⁴. The availability and abundance of critical minerals is also another favourable factor in the pursuit of energy transition in Africa. UNEP notes that the global transition from fossil fuels to clean energy sources depends on critical energy transition minerals including copper, lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, and graphite, which support clean energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, electricity transmission systems, and electric vehicles²⁵. In particular, it has been observed that Africa holds significant deposits of the planet's critical minerals including cobalt,

¹⁹ United Nations., 'Advancing SDG 7 in Africa.' Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023%20Advancing%20SDG7%20in%20the%20Africa-062923.pdf> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²⁰ The Renewable Energy Transition in Africa: Powering Access, Resilience and Prosperity., Available at https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/Study_Renewable%20Energy%20Transition%20Africa-EN.pdf (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²¹ African Union., 'Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want.' Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework_document_book.pdf (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Africa Renewable Energy Manufacturing Initiative., Available at <https://www.seforall.org/programmes/un-energy/green-industrialization-hub/aremi> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Critical Energy Transition Minerals' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/energy/renewable-energy/critical-energy-transition-minerals> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

bauxite, chromium, copper, graphite, manganese and rare earths which provide opportunities to fast-track energy transition in the continent towards a clean, sustainable, low-carbon and net-zero future²⁶.

Africa therefore has several favourable factors that can enable the continent to achieve the ideal of energy transition. It has been observed that the production of renewable energy is growing in Africa with hydro, solar, wind, geothermal, biofuels and biomass accounting for a significant percentage of the total primary energy produced on the continent²⁷. By leveraging renewable energy sources especially solar, wind, hydropower and geothermal among others, African nations are diversifying their energy mix, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, promoting environmental sustainability, and enhancing energy security²⁸. The transition towards renewable energy in Africa is creating new investment opportunities, fostering innovation, creating jobs, supporting livelihoods, and improving socio-economic growth by supporting key sectors such as education, healthcare, water, and agriculture²⁹.

However, the energy transition in Africa is also fuelling injustices and inequalities with negative impacts on both people and planet. For instance, it has been observed that marginalization and inadequate representation of vulnerable and minority groups in energy transition decision-making processes in Africa fuels injustices and inequalities including through failure to improve electricity connectivity in remote areas and disparities in job creation³⁰. In addition, investors, both globally and in Africa, have been accused of violating the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of indigenous and vulnerable communities during the implementation of renewable energy projects leading to land injustices, conflicts and environmental damage³¹. Further, unsustainable extraction of critical minerals has been a major source of environmental and social conflicts involving indigenous and local populations³². Displacement of indigenous and local

²⁶ Mo Ibrahim Foundation., 'Africa's Critical Minerals: Africa at the Heart of a Low-Carbon Future' Available at <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2022-11/minerals-resource-governance.pdf> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²⁷ United Nations Trade and Development., 'Commodities at a Glance: Special Issue on Access to Energy in Sub-Saharan Africa.' Available at Available at <https://unctad.org/publication/commodities-glance-special-issue-access-energy-sub-saharan-africa#:~:text=Access%20to%20energy%20is%20defined,be%20scaled%20up%20over%20time> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²⁸ Global Energy Alliance., 'Africa's Steady Race Towards Renewable Energy Sources' Available at <https://energyalliance.org/africas-steady-race-towards-renewable-energy-sources/> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Akrofi. M et al., 'Characterizing 'injustices' in clean energy transitions in Africa' *Energy for Sustainable Development*, 2024

³¹ The Role of Fossil Fuel and Renewable Energy Projects in Conflict Across Africa., Op Cit

³² United Nations. 'The rights of Indigenous Peoples in the context of critical minerals to ensure a just transition : note / by the Secretariat' Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4077484?v=pdf#files> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

populations from their lands and territories, failure to maximize benefits at the local level, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and conflicts are some of the key injustices arising from unsustainable exploitation of Africa's critical minerals needed to support energy transition³³.

In light of the foregoing concerns, it is imperative to uphold justice, equity, fairness and human rights in energy transition in Africa.

3.0 Towards Justice in Energy Transition in Africa

Africa has immense potential to accelerate energy transition for people and planet. The abundance of renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar, hydro, and geothermal can ensure that Africa achieves universal access to clean, modern, reliable, affordable and sustainable energy³⁴. In addition, the availability of critical minerals including cobalt, bauxite, chromium, copper, graphite, manganese and rare earths in Africa can enable the continent fast-track energy transition due to the important role that these minerals play in renewable energy technologies³⁵. With renewable energy developments being implemented across Africa, there is hope that the continent can achieve energy transition for socio-economic development, environmental sustainability and human progress.

However, in light of current challenges facing renewable energy developments in Africa, it is imperative to foster justice in energy transition. In particular, ensuring inclusion and participation of all stakeholders is a key agenda towards equity, justice and fairness in energy transition in Africa. In order to achieve this goal, there is need involve all parties especially vulnerable groups such as indigenous and local communities in renewable energy developments in Africa. It has been observed that indigenous and local communities in Africa face injustices and inequalities in the shift to renewable energy due to violation of their land rights, exclusion from decision-making processes, and environmental damage in their lands and territories³⁶. Consequently, there is need to promote inclusion and participation of indigenous and local communities in energy transition in Africa including through upholding their FPIC in renewable energy developments. It has been observed that FPIC can enable governments and private investors to proactively manage

³³ United Nations., 'Securing Indigenous Rights in the Energy Transition: Preventing Harm, Ensuring Consent, and Promoting Equity in Transition Minerals Extraction' Available at https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Galina_Angarova_EGM_2024_0.pdf (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

³⁴ African Union., 'Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want.' Op Cit

³⁵ Mo Ibrahim Foundation., 'Africa's Critical Minerals: Africa at the Heart of a Low-Carbon Future' Op Cit

³⁶ Impact of renewable energy projects on Indigenous communities in Kenya., Available at <https://www.iwgia.org/en/articles/impact-of-renewable-energy-projects-on-indigenous-communities-in-kenya> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

relationships with indigenous and local communities towards effectively addressing human rights, land and environmental conservation concerns in renewable energy projects in Africa³⁷.

Ensuring equitable benefit-sharing is also necessary towards achieving justice in energy transition in Africa. It has been observed that failure to enhance equitable benefit-sharing of Africa's natural resources is a major source of inequalities and injustices while also fuelling natural resource-based conflicts that are prevalent throughout the continent³⁸. In particular, since indigenous and local populations in Africa bear the most burden in renewable energy developments, there is need to maximize benefit-sharing for them in form of employment opportunities, affordable and clean energy, and investments in local education, agriculture and healthcare³⁹.

Promoting peace is also a fundamental ideal for justice in energy transition in Africa. Concerns such as land injustices, environmental degradation, and inequitable benefit-sharing arrangements are increasingly driving renewable energy conflicts in Africa undermining peace and development⁴⁰. Peace is a fundamental agenda in energy transition in Africa since it creates conditions that can facilitate investments in renewable energy, mitigate risks for investors and stakeholders in the energy sector, ensure effective management of conflicts involving investors and local communities, and ensure a win-win scenario for both environmental protection and economic development in the continent⁴¹. In particular, embracing Appropriate Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques such as negotiation, mediation and arbitration is key towards ensuring peace and justice in energy transition. Since ADR processes such as negotiation and mediation focus on collaboration and cooperation, they can enable stakeholders in the renewable energy sectors including governments and investors to effectively address community concerns, foster collaborative relationships, and streamline project implementation towards achieving justice, equity and fairness in energy transition⁴². In renewable energy developments, collaborative processes such as negotiation and mediation provide parties with the opportunity to manage and resolve disputes before they escalate, which can not only save time and costs but can also preserve critical business relationships and ensure the long-term sustainability and

³⁷ Building a resilient social license to operate in Africa's renewable energy transition., Available at <https://www.sustainability.com/insights/building-a-resilient-social-license-to-operate-in-africas-renewable-energy-transition/> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

³⁸ Fagbadebo. O., Binza. M., Kabange. M., 'Resource-Based Conflicts in Africa' Available at https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-25151-1_6 (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

³⁹ Building a resilient social license to operate in Africa's renewable energy transition., Op Cit

⁴⁰ The Role of Fossil Fuel and Renewable Energy Projects in Conflict Across Africa., Op Cit

⁴¹ Owa. I., 'The Role of Arbitration in the Energy Transition in Africa' Available at <https://arbitrationblog.kluwerarbitration.com/2024/04/16/2024-lcia-west-africa-roadshow-the-role-of-arbitration-in-the-energy-transition-in-africa/> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

⁴² Graham. M., 'Sunny Days Ahead: Using ADR to Fuel the Future of Green Energy' *Journal of Dispute Resolution.*, Volume 2024, Issue 1

viability of renewable energy projects⁴³. Further, since they focus on participation and cooperation, negotiation and mediation are ideal in promoting the right of local communities and indigenous peoples to FPIC for peace, justice and fairness⁴⁴. Arbitration also provides a neutral and binding forum for managing complex renewable energy disputes involving international parties towards a peaceful, just and smooth transition to cleaner energy sources⁴⁵. Utilising ADR processes such as negotiation, mediation and arbitration can therefore ensure peace and justice in energy transition in Africa.

Embracing *Ubuntu* is also necessary for justice, fairness and equity in Africa's energy transition. The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* which states that '*I am because we are*' places emphasis on '*being self through others*'⁴⁶. *Ubuntu* advocates for peace, harmony, solidarity, restorative justice and social-cohesion towards ensuring the well-being of all⁴⁷. In particular, encoding *Ubuntu* in energy transition in Africa can lead to justice including through fair and even distribution of renewable energy projects for the benefit of all, equitable benefit-sharing in order to ensure that every person benefits from renewable energy developments, inclusivity and participation in energy transition decision-making processes for communal well-being, and environmental conservation in energy transition due to the interconnectedness between humanity and nature⁴⁸.

4.0 Conclusion

The transition to renewable energy in Africa is necessary towards unlocking socio-economic development and environmental sustainability for people and planet. However, due to underlying challenges, there is need to promote justice, equity and fairness in energy transition. This can be achieved by ensuring inclusion, participation, benefit-sharing, peace and *Ubuntu*.

⁴³ Managing and Resolving Cross-Border Disputes in the Energy Sector.' Available at <https://www.ashurst.com/en/insights/managing-and-resolving-cross-border-disputes-in-the-energy-sector/> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

⁴⁴ Buxton. A., & Wilson. E., 'FPIC and the Extractive Industries: A Guide to Applying the Spirit of Free, Prior and Informed Consent in Industrial Projects' Available at <https://www.iiied.org/16530iiied> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

⁴⁵ Owa. I., 'The Role of Arbitration in the Energy Transition in Africa' Op Cit

⁴⁶ Mugumbate. J., & Nyanguru. A., 'Exploring African Philosophy: The Value of Ubuntu in Social Work.' Available at <https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4272&context=sspapers&httpsredir=1&referer#:~:text=Ubuntu%20can%20best%20be%20described,ngumuntu%20ngabantu%20in%20Zulu%20language> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Chipango. E. F., 'Toward an Ubuntu Framework of Distributive Energy Justice' Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21550085.2026.2646726> (Accessed on 06/10/2026)

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