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The Just Transition to a Decarbonised Economy for South Africa (JUST SA)



Supporting pathway implementation of a just transition towards an environmentally sustainable, climate-change resilient, low-carbon economy and just society

The challenge

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 envisions South Africa's transition to 'an environmentally sustainable, climate-change resilient, low-carbon economy and just society'.

Additionally, South Africa has robust environmental regulations, including a Climate Change Bill which was signed into law by President Ramaphosa in 2024. Yet, South Africa has one of the most carbon-intensive economies in the world due to its reliance on fossil fuels in the electricity, industrial and transportation sectors. Coal accounts for 72.1% of the country's primary energy, and is also exported.

The triple challenge – unemployment, poverty and inequality – remain deeply entrenched in South Africa's socio-economic landscape. With a Gini coefficient of 0.63, South Africa is ranked the most unequal society in the world in terms of income. Unemployment is increasing exponentially, with the rate currently at 43,1% in Q1 of 2025, up from 41,9% in Q4 of 2024. Youth unemployment among 15- to 34-year-olds stands at 46,1%. With around 6,000 abandoned mines posing environmental and safety risks, government reforms aim to strengthen closure and rehabilitation policies. Mining pollution, including air, soil and water contamination, severely impacts local communities.

As the country aims to phase out the use of coal, job losses are expected, which will worsen the socio-economic challenges, disproportionately affecting already vulnerable communities and exacerbating the unequal gender relations in South Africa. This socio-economic shift underscores the importance of an inclusive and socially just transition supporting the energy transition and transformation of the economy.



Project name	The Just Transition to a Decarbonised Economy for South Africa (JUST SA)
Commissioned by	International Climate Initiative (IKI) and German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK)
Project region	South Africa, with a focus on the Mpumalanga province
Political partner	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)
Duration	01/09/2022–31/08/2027
Financial volume	€15 million



Fly ash beneficiated from coal waste used to produce green cement, bricks, pavers, barricades



Samanjalo founders on the Samanjalo site at Mpumalanga, South Africa

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Our approach

The Just Transition to a Decarbonised Economy for South Africa (JUST SA) supports the implementation of pathways towards an environmentally sustainable, climate-change resilient, low-carbon economy and just society.

At national level, the project contributes to the implementation of key policy documents and facilitates dialogue for and information sharing with multiple stakeholders, ensuring an inclusive and results-oriented process.

At provincial level, the project assists stakeholders in Mpumalanga in initiating alternative development pathways for a diversified regional economy and capacitates targeted SMMEs to unlock their growth potential and receive access to finance.

At local level, activities towards a just transition are set up in selected local municipalities and affected communities and marginalised groups empowered with inclusive bottom-up approaches to community development.

Furthermore, solutions to sustainably rehabilitate coal mining land and water are sought through research, policy implementation and community engagement.

The project is part of the International Climate Initiative (IKI). The initiative places clear emphasis on climate change mitigation, adaptation to the impacts of climate change and the protection of biological diversity. These efforts provide various co-benefits, particularly the improvement of living conditions in partner countries.

Since its establishment in 2008, the IKI has launched more than 750 climate and biodiversity projects in more than 60 countries. The resources for international climate and biodiversity activities carried out by GIZ and other implementing organisations such as KfW Development Bank, multilateral organisations like UN organisations, NGOs, research institutes, foundations and private companies have grown steadily since the programme was launched. Whereas some €170 million was available for on-going projects in 2008, by 2020 the figure had risen to €601 million.

JUST SA is implemented through a consortium comprised of GIZ, the Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS), the National Business Initiative (NBI), and the World Wide Fund for Nature South Africa (WWF), and in close collaboration with Indalo Inclusive, the Mpumalanga Green Cluster Agency (MGCA), the Just Energy Transition Project Management Unit (JET PMU), the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) and others.

Key achievements and anticipated results

- Market Intelligence Reports have been developed and published through the Mpumalanga Green Cluster Agency (MGCA). The reports highlight investment opportunities in the green economy in Mpumalanga.
- The MGCA is capacitated as a key institution to facilitate green growth in Mpumalanga, for example with a corporate strategy, personnel support and the Green Pitch Challenge, gathering entrepreneurs, innovators, investors and experts in green technology and sustainability and showcasing solutions in sustainability.
- As of July 2025, TIPS has conducted trainings on the Green Economy and Just Transition in 6 of the 9 provinces and capacitated 180 municipal officials.
- Green enterprises are co-created with communities affected by the just energy transition, such as around Komati. Former coal workers are trained on innovative thinking, costing principles, and understanding the entrepreneurial profile to establish successful ventures and upscale innovations in water, energy and agriculture. 14 out of 22 enterprises will receive grant funding.
- Aiming at informing relevant policy decision makers and policy processes, TIPS has started research at a national and provincial level on elements of green and inclusive industrialisation, economic diversification, just transition financing and labour policies.
- Several technical advisory groups and stakeholder reference group events have been hosted by WWF. These events are held with the purpose of obtaining technical direction on research while also sharing the research conducted with key stakeholders on aspects of mine rehabilitation and mine water treatment.
- Aiming to reach affected communities and the South African population in total, JUST SA supports dialogue platforms for exchange and information-sharing possibilities on Just Transition topics through workshops, communication campaigns, the JUST SA website and just transition knowledge platforms.
- Going forward, around 300 green SMMEs will be mentored, coached and capacitated to unlock their growth potential and receive access to finance, offering new opportunities to diversify the regional economy and contribute to carbon-neutral economic development and job creation.

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