

JUST TRANSITION BOOK LAUNCH

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

A JUST TRANSITION TO A LOW CARBON FUTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is a great pleasure and honour to welcome all participants at this launch of MISTRA's publication on *A Just Transition to a Low Carbon Future in South Africa*. Our profound gratitude is extended to Minister Barbara Creecy for joining us this morning.

In 2015, the Mapungubwe Institute released a publication on the green economy entitled, *Earth, Wind and Fire* – this was less about creativity but more a reflection of the age profile and musical preferences of MISTRA's team at the time. We sought then to unpack the political, economic and security implications of discourse on the green economy.

Today, definitive global consensus has been reached that climate change is an existential threat for flora and fauna alike. And a critical element in the discourse is about the disastrous impact of global warming on the poor. Yet, depending on how it is managed, the transition to a low-carbon future can itself further worsen the conditions of life of the marginalised.

It is therefore necessary to go beyond technicist, ecological interventions to a broader, transdisciplinary approach to this challenge. The notion of a just transition has arisen against this backdrop – originating within the trade union movement and finding resonance among those advocating for common but differentiated responsibility.

South Africa is in the midst of such debate, made the more urgent also by the Covid-19 pandemic.

This book proceeds from the premise that South Africa's economic structure, political economy and broader social relations all come into play in charting the path to a low-carbon society.

The authors argue that South Africa should use this opportunity to build a green minerals-energy complex. Extraction of minerals will continue; and South Africa has endowments that are important for green technologies such as Platinum Group Metals, manganese, cobalt and nickel. Unlike in the past, a significant part of the mineral endowments can be processed within the country for domestic and global use. The development of the hydrogen economy, for instance, will require bold practical actions in line with the Hydrogen Society Roadmap launched by government last week.

In other words, a just transition should be about an industrial strategy combining investments and broad-based empowerment that includes skills development.

The book cautions about the danger of powerful forces seeking to subsume low-carbon efforts to the pursuit of large profits and climate diplomacy premised on selfish geopolitical interests. It also warns against the warped logic that current carbon-intensive jobs can be preserved at the expense of humanity's future. Required, rather, are broad partnerships – with government, investors, workers and communities all part of the effort.

Spatially, local government will have a key role to play; as will complementary continental efforts in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area. And the decarbonisation of electricity generation, especially in the Mpumalanga province, will require focussed action.

What about transition finance? It is understandable that there should be focus on coal-gobbling Eskom and the energy sector. But just transition finance should apply to the whole project of green industrialisation; and hype should not be allowed to substitute for objective analysis of the structure of funding, and of the conditionalities and costs attached to its various components.

The main message of this book is that the transition to a low-carbon society is possible, but it can only succeed if it is just and handled collaboratively.

MISTRA wishes to thank the authors, editors, peer reviewers and coordinators responsible for this volume; as well as those who contribute to the Institute's sustenance, including the Department of Science and Innovation for its support for this project.

And so, you are all welcome and we hope you will enjoy this engagement!

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