

Changing mindsets is key to the just energy transition

By [Viren Sookhun](#)

12 Oct 2022

There can be no doubt of the need for South Africa (and the world) to focus on the evolution to net zero carbon emissions. The just energy transition is a journey toward achieving this goal by 2050, but there is no single element that will see our country achieve this transition, and multiple energy streams will need to be combined as part of the process.



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This means that the traditional siloes that exist between government and the private sector, and between various energy producers, will need to fall away. Partnerships will be the key to achieving our goals around energy, but for these partnerships to succeed, we need to fundamentally change the mindset around the way we do business in this space.

Fraught with complexity

The just energy transition is a multifaceted puzzle made up of many intertwined components. While renewable energy, including wind, hydro and solar, will form important pieces of the journey, coal is not a problem that is simply going to disappear overnight. We are still heavily reliant on coal, and it forms the basis of global energy supply. In addition, there are new elements to add in, from battery storage to green hydrogen, helium, kerosene, and natural gas.

Independent power producers (IPPs) are a significant part of the energy transition in South Africa, and as a critical stakeholder with significant investment from both the public and private sector, getting IPPs into commercial operation is critical. This is something that South Africa has struggled with up to this point, however with new legislation there is hope that the process can be escalated.

The overall picture is broad and complex, but the overarching theme is that every new methodology must be geared toward becoming more environmentally friendly and sustainable, moving away from greenhouse gas and carbon emissions.



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What about the waste?

The just energy transition is about more than simply changing the way we produce electricity, it is about creating sustainability and a circular economy. This means there is also the question of what happens to the various elements of renewable energy generation when they reach end of life, such as solar panels and turbine blades. All parts need to be recyclable and reusable, and several enterprises are already stepping up to deliver on this requirement.

The reality is that the transition cannot simply be about kicking the can further down the road and leaving new challenges for future generations. Whatever we do within this transition, there needs to be a plan for exit and end of life. To achieve this, partnerships are critical. We cannot continue to operate in isolated silos, because without bringing together all of the various components and collaborating effectively, the just energy transition cannot happen.



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Collaboration is the foundation of success

The biggest challenge we currently face is not necessarily changing energy sources but changing mindsets and the way we do business. The economy is built on competition, and yet to create the circular economy that the just energy transition will lead to, we need to move toward an environment of cooperation and collaboration. Global and local players, private sector and government, financial institutions, supply chain and infrastructure providers, all need to work together to achieve common goals.

We also need the right skills to facilitate every change and every adjustment at every point of the journey. The labour market is another key piece of the puzzle, and we need to focus on upskilling and moving people up the ladder to make them more employable and help to create sustainable economic growth alongside the energy transition. Temporary employment services partners are key; they can provide the necessary workers for employers and give back to employees in a way that creates continuous development and improvement.



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Alongside the energy transition is a people transition that needs as much, if not more, priority and focus. We cannot change the way we deliver electricity without prioritising the quality of life of our people. When we get to 2050, the measure of our success will lie not just in net zero carbon emissions, but in how we have succeeded in improving the quality of life for people, access to services and basic needs, and skills development. People are the critical element of the journey, and this lies at the heart of a sustainable future.

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