

MANIFESTO FOR AN ECOSOCIAL ENERGY TRANSITION FROM THE PEOPLES OF THE SOUTH

A new manifesto critiques the "clean energy" transitions of the Global North and offers an alternative vision from the Global South.

Peoples of the Global South

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Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South

An appeal to leaders, institutions, and our brothers and sisters

More than two years after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic—and now alongside the catastrophic consequences of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—a “new normal” has emerged. This new global status quo reflects a worsening of various crises: social, economic, political, ecological, bio-medical, and geopolitical.

Environmental collapse approaches. Everyday life has become ever more militarized. Access to good food, clean water, and affordable health care has become even more restricted. More governments have turned autocratic. The wealthy have become wealthier, the powerful more powerful, and unregulated technology has only accelerated these trends. The engines of this unjust status quo—capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism, and various fundamentalisms—are making a bad situation worse. Therefore, we must urgently debate and implement new visions of ecosocial transition and transformation that are gender-just, regenerative, and popular, that are at once local and international.

In this Manifesto for an Ecosocial Energy Transition from the Peoples of the South, we hold that the problems of the Global – geopolitical – South are different from those of the Global North and rising powers such as China. An imbalance of power between these two realms not only persists because of a colonial legacy but has deepened because of a neocolonial energy model. In the context of climate change, ever rising energy needs, and biodiversity loss, the capitalist centers have stepped up the pressure to extract natural wealth and rely on cheap labor from the countries on the periphery. Not only is the well-known extractive paradigm still in place but the North’s ecological debt to the South is rising.

What’s new about this current moment are the “clean energy transitions” of the North that have put even more pressure on the Global South to yield up cobalt and lithium for the production of high-tech batteries, balsa wood for wind turbines, land for large solar arrays, and new infrastructure for hydrogen megaprojects. This decarbonization of the rich, which is market-based and export-oriented, depends on a new phase of environmental despoliation of the Global South, which affects the lives of millions of women, men, and children, not to mention non-human life. Women, especially from agrarian societies, are amongst the most impacted. In this way, the Global South has once again become a zone of sacrifice, a basket of purportedly inexhaustible resources for the countries of the North.

A priority for the Global North has been to secure global supply chains, especially of critical raw materials, and prevent certain countries, like China, from monopolizing access. The G7 trade ministers, for instance, recently championed a responsible, sustainable, and transparent supply chain for critical minerals via international cooperation, policy, and finance, including the facilitation of trade in environmental goods and services through the WTO. The Global North has pushed for more trade and investment agreements with the Global South to satisfy its need for resources, particularly those integral to “clean energy transitions.” These agreements, designed to reduce barriers to trade and investment, protect and enhance corporate power and rights by subjecting states to potential legal suits according to investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanisms. The Global North is using these agreements to control the “clean energy transition” and create a new colonialism.

Governments of the South, meanwhile, have fallen into a debt trap, borrowing money to build up industries and large-scale agriculture to supply the North. To repay these debts, governments have felt compelled to extract more resources from the ground, creating a vicious circle of inequality. Today, the imperative to move beyond fossil fuels without any significant reduction in consumption in the North has only increased the pressure to exploit these natural resources. Moreover, as it moves ahead with its own energy transitions, the North has paid only lip service to its responsibility to address its historical and rising ecological debt to the South.

Minor changes in the energy matrix are not enough. The entire energy system must be transformed, from production and distribution to consumption and waste. Substituting electric vehicles for internal-combustion cars is insufficient, for the entire transportation model needs changing, with a reduction of energy consumption and the promotion of sustainable options. In this way, relations must become more equitable not only between the center and periphery countries but also within countries between the elite and the public. Corrupt elites in the Global South have also collaborated in this unjust system by profiting from extraction, repressing human rights and environmental defenders, and perpetuating economic inequality.

Rather than solely technological, the solutions to these interlocked crises are above all political.

As activists, intellectuals, and organizations from different countries of the South, we call on change agents from different parts of the world to commit to a radical, democratic, gender-just, regenerative, and popular ecosocial transition that transforms both the energy sector and the industrial and agricultural spheres that depend on large-scale energy inputs. According to the different movements for climate justice, “transition is inevitable, but justice is not.”

We still have time to start a just and democratic transition. We can transition away from the neoliberal economic system in a direction that sustains life, combines social justice with environmental justice, brings together egalitarian and democratic values with a resilient, holistic social policy, and restores an ecological balance necessary for a healthy planet. But for that we need more political imagination and more utopian visions of another society that is socially just and respects our planetary common house.

The energy transition should be part of a comprehensive vision that addresses radical inequality in the distribution of energy resources and advances energy democracy. It should de-

emphasize large-scale institutions—corporate agriculture, huge energy companies—as well as market-based solutions. Instead, it must strengthen the resilience of civil society and social organizations.

Therefore, we make the following 8 demands:

1. We warn that an energy transition led by corporate megaprojects, coming from the Global North and accepted by numerous governments in the South, entails the enlargement of the zones of sacrifice throughout the Global South, the persistence of the colonial legacy, patriarchy, and the debt trap. Energy is an elemental and inalienable human right, and energy democracy should be our goal.
2. We call on the peoples of the South to reject false solutions that come with new forms of energy colonialism, now in the name of a Green transition. We make an explicit call to continue political coordination among the peoples of the south while also pursuing strategic alliances with critical sectors in the North.
3. To mitigate the havoc of the climate crisis and advance a just and popular ecosocial transition, we demand the payment of the ecological debt. This means, in the face of the disproportionate Global North responsibility for the climate crisis and ecological collapse, the real implementation of a system of compensation to the global South. This system should include a considerable transfer of funds and appropriate technology, and should consider sovereign debt cancellation for the countries of the South. We support reparations for loss and damage experienced by Indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups and local communities due to mining, big dams, and dirty energy projects.
4. We reject the expansion of the hydrocarbon border in our countries—through fracking and offshore projects—and repudiate the hypocritical discourse of the European Union, which recently declared natural gas and nuclear energy to be “clean energies.” As already proposed in the Yasuni Initiative in Ecuador in 2007 and today supported by many social sectors and organizations, we endorse leaving fossil fuels underground and generating the social and labor conditions necessary to abandon extractivism and move toward a post-fossil-fuel future.
5. We similarly reject “green colonialism” in the form of land grabs for solar and wind farms, the indiscriminate mining of critical minerals, and the promotion of technological “fixes” such as blue or grey hydrogen. Enclosure, exclusion, violence, encroachment, and entrenchment have characterized past and current North-South energy relations and are not acceptable in an era of ecosocial transitions.
6. We demand the genuine protection of environment and human rights defenders, particularly indigenous peoples and women at the forefront of resisting extractivism.
7. The elimination of energy poverty in the countries of the South should be among our fundamental objectives—as well as the energy poverty of parts of the Global North—

through alternative, decentralized, equitably distributed projects of renewable energy that are owned and operated by communities themselves.

8. We denounce international trade agreements that penalize countries that want to curb fossil fuel extraction. We must stop the use of trade and investment agreements controlled by multinational corporations that ultimately promote more extraction and reinforce a new colonialism.

Our ecosocial alternative is based on countless struggles, strategies, proposals, and community-based initiatives. Our Manifesto connects with the lived experience and critical perspectives of Indigenous peoples and other local communities, women, and youth throughout the Global South. It is inspired by the work done on the rights of nature, buen vivir, vivir sabroso, sumac kawsay, ubuntu, swaraj, the commons, the care economy, agroecology, food sovereignty, post-extractivism, the pluriverse, autonomy, and energy sovereignty. Above all, we call for a radical, democratic, popular, gender-just, regenerative, and comprehensive ecosocial transition.

Following the steps of the Ecosocial and Intercultural Pact of the South, this Manifesto proposes a dynamic platform that invites you to join our shared struggle for transformation by helping to create collective visions and collective solutions.

We invite you to endorse this manifesto with your signature.

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