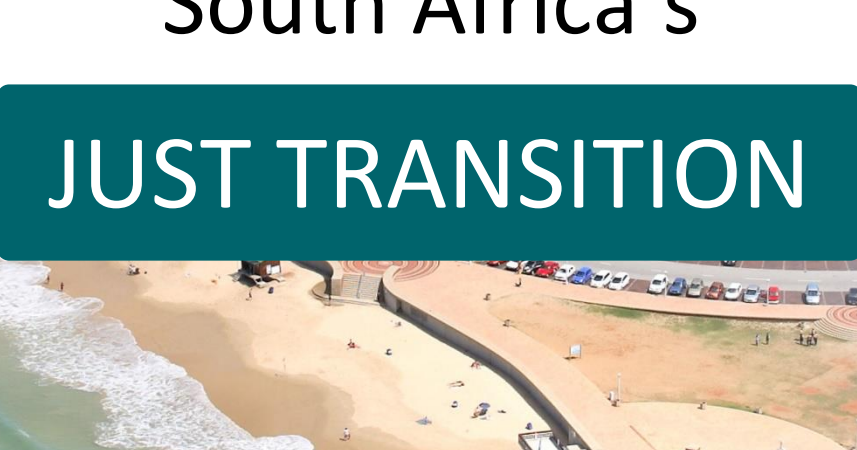
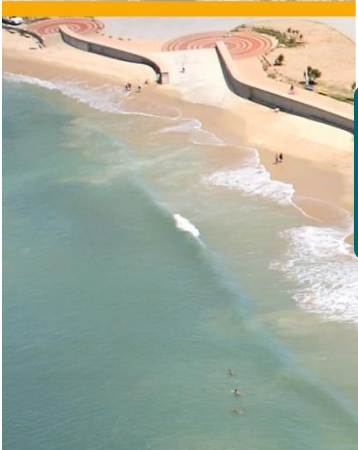
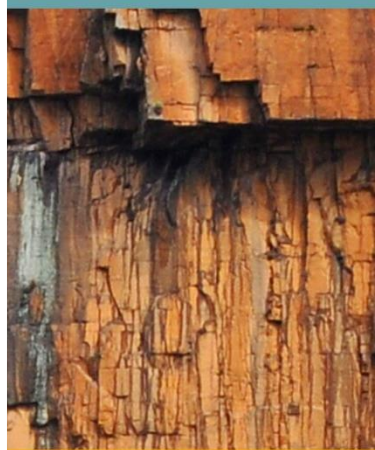
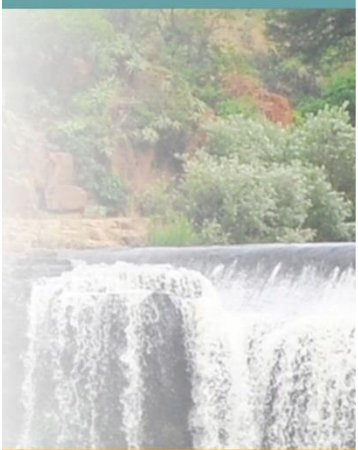
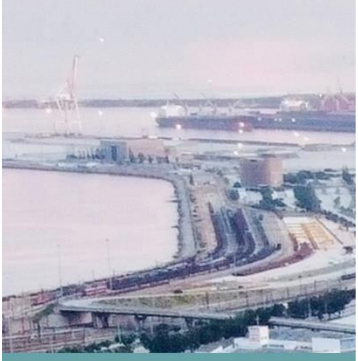




PRESIDENTIAL
CLIMATE COMMISSION
TOWARDS A JUST TRANSITION

Stakeholder
perspectives
on engaging with
South Africa's

JUST TRANSITION



About the Presidential Climate Commission

The Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) is a multi-stakeholder body established by the President of the Republic of South Africa. The PCC advises on the country's climate change response and supports a just transition to a low-carbon climate-resilient economy and society.

The PCC produces recommendations to government based on research and evidence and facilitates dialogue between social partners. The ultimate aim is to define the type of economy and society we want to achieve, and detail pathways for how to get there.

Disclaimer

This report was authored by ICLEI Africa and does not necessarily reflect the views of the PCC or the European Union (EU).

About this report

This report was prepared by ICLEI Africa to support the work of the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) on its stakeholder and community engagements on the just transition.

ICLEI Africa would like to thank all of the interviewees and community focus group participants whose insights contributed significantly to the development of this report.



Project funder

This report was produced thanks to generous support from the European Union Climate Dialogues Project (EUCDs), and funded by the EU. ICLEI Africa is grateful for their partnership.



**Funded by
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EU Disclaimer:

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Project partners

EUCD, EU, ICLEI Africa, and the PCC.

Citation

ICLEI Africa. (2024). Stakeholder perspectives on engaging with South Africa's just transition. PCC Technical Report. Presidential Climate Commission: Pretoria, South Africa.

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared with all due diligence and care, based on the best available information at the time of publication. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of ICLEI Africa. Any decisions made by other parties based on this report are solely the responsibility of those parties.

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List of abbreviations

CBO	Community-based organisation
COP	Conference of the Parties
EV	Electric vehicle
JET IP	Just Energy Transition Investment Plan
JETP	Just Energy Transition Partnership
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PCC	Presidential Climate Commission
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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1 Executive summary

South Africa's Climate Change Bill seeks to establish a legislative framework to enable an effective response to climate change which includes a long term, just transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy and society (Republic of South Africa, 2022). It defines a just transition as a “shift towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society and ecologically sustainable economies and societies which contribute toward the creation of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty” (Republic of South Africa, 2022:5).

Achieving an inclusive just transition that leaves no-one behind will need to be underpinned by a strategy to ensure robust stakeholder engagements. Such a strategy, incorporating justice, inclusion, trust and collaboration, will enable and strengthen engagement with social partners on the just transition and climate change. The Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) was established in 2020 to guide South Africa's national just transition. Its stakeholder engagement efforts contribute to laying a foundation and creating a platform for South Africa to work towards developing a truly just and people-centred transition, underpinned by recognition that the “major economic, social, and environmental decisions required for a just transition require social partners to forge a consensus around the transition” (PCC, 2022a:25).

The primary objectives of this report are to:

- 1 Assess how social partners understand and interpret the just transition; and
- 2 Understand how the PCC can strengthen its stakeholder engagement work, in building trust and social consensus on a just transition in South Africa.

Figure 1 summarises the research approach and key thematic findings:

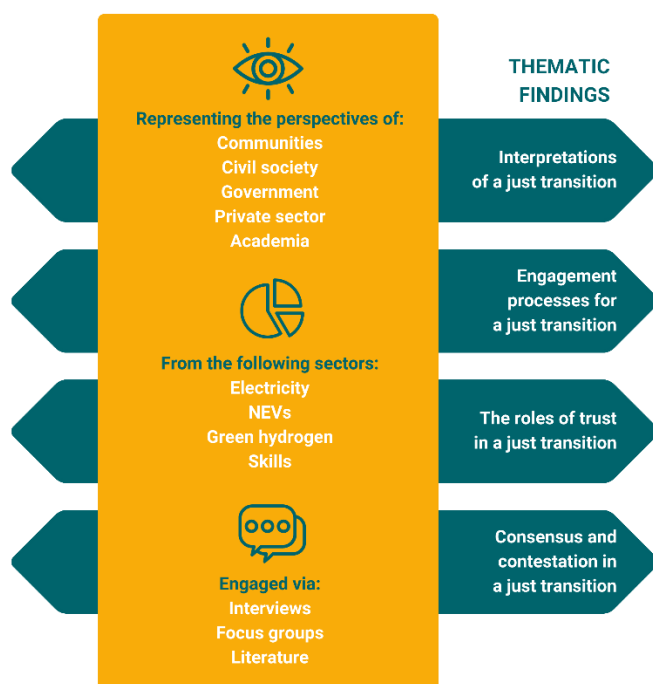


Figure 1: Who was engaged and how, and the four key thematic findings

The thematic findings are based on a review of the literature and research engagements with social partners across the study's four sectors, namely: electricity, new energy vehicles, green hydrogen, and skills. These sectors were selected because they are priority sectors for South Africa's just transition and decarbonisation, and form the focus areas of the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP).

Table 1 presents the key messages linked to each thematic finding:

Table 1: Key messages linked to each thematic finding



Interpretations of South Africa's just transition

While most social partners are broadly supportive of a just transition, they hold a wide range of views on the pathways for achieving South Africa's just transition.

Research participants expressed the need for a broader understanding of a just transition with a greater focus on the justice aspects, energy poverty, service delivery and unemployment.

There is a demand for greater emphasis on developing a skills ecosystem that can reskill those in fossil fuel sectors, and build a skills base necessary to innovate and drive a just transition.

There is a need for greater collaboration between the PCC, government, sectors, and social partners. Interviewees emphasised that greater collaboration would enable social partners to better identify *and* enact their roles in the just transition, as well as avoid duplication of efforts.



Social partner perspectives on just transition engagement processes

Effective and thorough stakeholder engagement is time-intensive for both organisers and participants.

Meaningful and regular two-way engagement is vital to social partners across sectors and should not come at the cost of action.

Opportunities for social partners to give input to the PCC on just transition related matters, with transparent feedback on how this input will be taken into consideration, is key. This includes clarity on purpose(s) of engagement, and management of expectations.

Engaging social partners in an inclusive manner builds buy-in and support, while minimising antagonism.

Social partners' capacity for contributing to knowledge production and engagement plays a key role in enabling inclusivity, and improving the depth and quality of engagements. Such capacity is influenced by a range of interlinked factors (e.g. time and financial resources to attend engagements) that require consideration when planning engagements.



Building trust and addressing mistrust in the just transition

Building and sustaining legitimacy and support in a low-trust environment requires continual work to address valid concerns as well as misconceptions.

Some of the greatest areas of misunderstanding, mistrust and fear around the just transition, appear to relate to knowledge gaps. These knowledge gaps need to be addressed, but knowledge alone is insufficient to bring about change.

The PCC plays a key role as a boundary organisation, knowledge broker, and translator of relevance. Continued work is needed to communicate research findings in open and transparent ways that demonstrate their relevance and implications for different users of the knowledge, and ultimately builds trust.

Communication from the PCC must clearly demonstrate that its work represents the interests of a diversity of social partners, by framing this work in terms that are relevant, working with local knowledge brokers.



Building consensus and addressing contestation in the just transition

Sources of consensus and contestation include: the need for a just transition, what it will consist of, and how it will be achieved, as well as around values, data and interests.

Allowing for contestation and debate can unlock progress and solutions, even when consensus is difficult to reach.

It is easier to build consensus around abstract and long-term issues, than it is on concrete and short-term issues. Ultimately these need to be aligned to establish a coherent, long-term pathway.

In the process of building consensus and making decisions, different knowledge sources and systems need to be valued and drawn upon to shift consensus towards greater ambition, transformation and implementation.

Based on the research findings, recommendations for stakeholder engagement have been developed, presented in [Section 5](#) and summarised below. While the focus of these recommendations is directed at the PCC, they are equally relevant for the South African government and social partners, so that they too share the responsibility to work together to achieve a just transition.

Recommendation 1: Commit to a set of core guiding principles

- Practice agility and adaptability to new information, opportunities and ways of knowing as they become available to navigate the uncertainty and complexity of the transition.
- Humility is central to recognising, drawing in, and working with diverse experiences, knowledge and wisdom.
- Demonstrate change through concrete actions that can be scaled to align with ambitious and transformative long-term visions and goals.
- There are different entry points for involving different actor groups, so tailor strategies accordingly.
- Connect individual stories of social partners to the bigger picture of South Africa's just transition to demonstrate the opportunities and risks that lie ahead.

Recommendation 2: Practice robust engagement

The depth and quality of engagement depends on the accessibility of a process and the participation of actors. Accessibility of a process is determined by, amongst other features: process design, their frequency and temporal nature, and format and location of engagements. The participation of actors is determined by their knowledge, capacities, resources, interests, values and priorities. All these features provide guidance for the PCC, South African government, and social partners as they work towards an inclusive and participatory just transition.

Meaningful engagement requires an acknowledgement of the different starting points of social partners and inherent power imbalances that exist, and to intentionally create hospitable spaces that value the diverse knowledge and insights beyond the 'usual suspects'.

Transparent communication assists in managing social partners' expectations regarding the outcomes of engagement processes, and to demonstrate how and why social partners' inputs are incorporated or not. Truly valuing inputs also requires the flexibility to adjust plans and decisions, and make space for unexpected outcomes. To guard against extractive engagement, there needs to be a commitment to long-term engagement with social partners. Robust engagement is time intensive: progress and pace need to be carefully balanced with the depth of engagements needed to build trust and consensus. At

the same time, given the urgency of the crises South Africa is facing, robust engagement cannot come at the cost of urgent action. Both must go hand-in-hand to enable learning by doing.

Recommendation 3: Take steps to build trust and address mistrust

The PCC is a key boundary organisation, knowledge broker, and translator of relevance. There are multiple forms and uses of knowledge, the flows of which the PCC, along with the South African government and all social partners, can assist in facilitating to bring about change.

Knowledge gaps around the just transition are a source of misunderstanding and mistrust. The PCC, government and social partners will need to work together to identify these gaps to interrogate what knowledge needs to be produced, by whom, and how.

Knowledge needs to be communicated in compelling storylines to demonstrate the relevance of information to the diverse array of social partners. This is best done via knowledge brokers embedded in communities, who share the life experiences of the targeted constituencies. For gaining traction, “who” communicates a message is as important as “what” the message is.

A live database of social partners needs to be developed and constantly updated, which can be used for outreach for engagements to ensure coverage becomes increasingly more comprehensive and granular. This will also aid systematic and tailored ways of engaging with different social partners in advance of engagements.

Developing a monitoring and evaluation tool to assess and report on progress of the just transition would help to demonstrate the PCC's commitment to transparency and accountability. The PCC is currently developing such a tool and planning to pilot it in the course of the year.

Recommendation 4: Build consensus and take contestation seriously

To bring about the scale and depth of change required for South Africa's just transition, not only the issues for which there is unanimous support can be relied on. Contested or thorny issues need to be tackled properly, as avoiding them can derail processes later on.

The PCC, government and all social partners need to participate in shifting the location of consensus away from the lowest common denominator and in the direction of greater ambition, transformation, and implementation, through designing and operating effective engagement processes and supporting knowledge production, use and communication. In doing this work, it is crucial to build diverse coalitions to establish broad-based support, especially to push for progress in areas where there is an urgent need for it.

A major source of contestation is that the losses of a just transition tend to be immediate and concrete, while the gains are more abstract, reserved for a time in the future. The PCC and the government need to convincingly demonstrate how these trade-offs will be managed in a phased manner that benefits those who are likely to encounter these immediate losses.

2 Introduction and overview

2.1 Objectives and scope of the report

Since its establishment in 2020, the Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) has held numerous and regular engagements, information sessions and dialogues on the just transition with diverse social partners across the country (PCC, 2022a). This work is underpinned by the recognition that the “major economic, social, and environmental decisions required for a just transition require social partners to forge a consensus around the transition” (PCC, 2022a:25). These engagements are summarised as being “exceptionally fruitful, with stakeholders interested and engaged – fertile ground for a compact to form over time” (PCC, 2022a:25). Members of the PCC Secretariat have emphasised that achieving an inclusive just transition that leaves no one behind, will need to be underpinned by an effective strategy to guide these engagements that incorporates justice, inclusion, trust and collaboration.

The PCC's community and stakeholder engagements create a platform for the country to work towards developing a just and people-centred transition. Stakeholder engagements are important for facilitating and fostering a collaborative approach to problem solving and including a diversity of voices, as well as enhancing stakeholder buy-in, and legitimising the PCC. The PCC commissioned ICLEI Africa to build on these activities and develop a more granular stakeholder analysis focusing on the key sectors, provinces and societal actors relevant to South Africa's just transition. The overall aim of this report is to enable the PCC to more effectively engage and collaborate with these actors.

The primary objectives of this report are to:

- 1 Assess how social partners understand and interpret a just transition; and
- 2 Understand how the PCC can effectively strengthen its stakeholder engagement, in building trust and social consensus on a just transition in South Africa.

The secondary objectives are to:

- 1 Understand social partners' perceptions of their roles in South Africa's just transition process;
- 2 Understand the relationships between key social partners in developing strategic alliances for more widespread impact on decision-making, policy and actions necessary for a just transition; and
- 3 Strengthen insights on community-level organisation and communication strategies, as well as knowledge and understanding of a just transition and climate change in South Africa.

2.2 Defining a just transition in South Africa

The concept of a just transition has its origin in the work of labour unions to reconcile environmental priorities with achieving justice and inclusion for workers (Ciplet and Harrison, 2020). Over the last decade there has been a steady incline of scholarship on a just transition globally and in South Africa (as illustrated by [Figure 2](#) below).

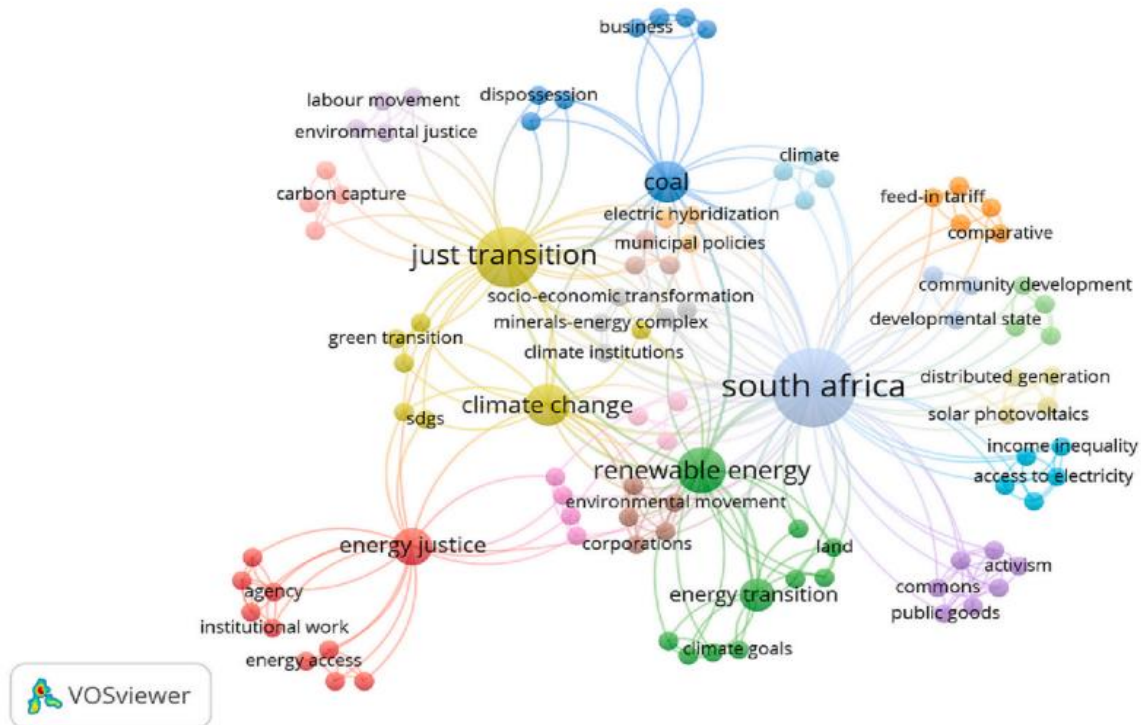


Figure 2: Scopus results for the period 2014-2022, highlighting a steady increase in just transition scholarship in South Africa (Source: Mirzania et al., 2023)

As Winkler et al., (2020:31) explain, “the conceptualisation of the Just Transition for South Africa reveals a strong appetite for transformation of the socio-economic relations that structure its energy systems.” A just transition could act as a potential catalyst for societal transformation across the country, ensuring that the transition addresses development challenges and considers workers' transition schemes, local economic resilience, and the development of new sectors (Burton et al., 2019). Developing and implementing policies and strategies that prioritise justice in this transition is critical for long-term prosperity and resilience (Swilling et al., 2016).

Civil society organisations and local communities are also contributing to thinking and knowledge production on a just transition. For example, the book *Down to Zero: Politics of the Transition* (Hallowes and Munnik, 2019) details the views and varying interests expressed by communities on climate change, alternative futures, and a just transition. It cautions against an unplanned coal transition and the adverse consequences thereof, and highlights the need to create coalitions, to build social power to shape transitions in line with the interests of communities (Hallowes and Munnik, 2019).

Connolly (2022) suggests that South Africa has become a ‘pioneer’ in just transitions for other countries to learn from, based on the national process to engage social partners, build a social compact, and establish pathways for a just transition. However, concerns have been raised about insufficient progress towards the attainment of the country’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and delays to the renewable energy programme (Swilling et al., 2017; Walwyn, 2020). Tellingly, in 2023, the World Economic Forum placed the country in the 82nd position out of 120 countries in the Energy Transition Index (WEF, 2023:58).

2.3 South Africa's emerging policy for a just transition

In recent years, the just transition has gained traction in policy circles. Internationally, the Paris Agreement recognised the importance of a just transition highlighting the “imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 2015:1). In 2022, at the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) a Work Programme on Just Transition Pathways was established, and the COP28 decision text on the global stocktake underlined the importance of the Work Programme, the role of just transitions in supporting more equitable mitigation outcomes, phase out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that are not aligned with just transitions, and the centrality of just transitions to countries' long-term low-emissions development strategies (UNFCCC, 2023).

South Africa's policy response to climate change is rooted in Section 24 of the Constitution (1996). Since 1996, South Africa's policy infrastructure to respond to climate change has become more robust and comprehensive, out of which policy for a just transition emerged. The term ‘just transition’ first appeared in South Africa's National Climate Change Response Policy (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2011), and has become embedded in domestic policy through the National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2012), NDC (Republic of South Africa, 2015), the National Planning Commission's Pathways for a Just Transition (National Planning Commission, 2019), and the NDC Update (Republic of South Africa, 2021). The National Assembly recently passed the Climate Change Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2022), which once promulgated will set in law the following definition of a just transition:



Just Transition

“means a shift towards a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy and society and ecologically sustainable economies and societies which contribute toward the creation of decent work for all, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty” (Republic of South Africa, 2022:5)

Similarly, South Africa's Just Transition Framework aims to “achieve a quality life for all South Africans, fostering climate resilience, reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, putting the people at the centre of decision making, and building the resilience of the economy” (PCC, 2022b:7), and highlights the centrality of the principles of procedural, restorative and distributive justice (PCC, 2022b).

The Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) articulates and costs South Africa's transition for the period 2023 to 2027 (The Presidency, 2022), while the JET Implementation Plan details how the JET IP could be implemented (The Presidency, 2023) across electricity, new energy vehicles, green hydrogen, skills, and municipalities. These sectors are important for the creation of green, resilient, and sustainable economies of the future, which will contribute towards establishing new development pathways for addressing the development objectives of the country and reducing poverty, inequality and unemployment.

3 Methodology

This section provides a summary of the qualitative research methodology employed by this report which drew on interviews, focus groups, and a desktop review of relevant policy documents, reports, and academic articles. As requested by the PCC, the study adopted a sectoral framing based on the JET IP, namely: electricity, new energy vehicles, green hydrogen, and skills (The Presidency, 2022).

3.1 Data collection

3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews

The primary data collection method was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key social partners from the sectors outlined above. Interviews are critical for gathering detailed accounts that are not readily available via documentary or other sources, thereby helping to bring to light perspectives influencing stakeholder engagement that may otherwise go unnoticed.

A stakeholder mapping exercise was undertaken to identify a diverse range of key social partners across the four JET IP sectors, including certain social partner groups that have previously had limited involvement in just transition and PCC engagement processes, as well as members of the PCC Secretariat. In total, from over 70 invitees, 38 interviews were conducted. In-depth, semi-structured interviews using a set of thematic questions related to the research objectives, allowed the interviews to unfold in a conversational manner, leaving room for new themes to emerge and interviewees to shape and enrich the process (Kitchin and Tate, 2000; Davies et al., 2002).

Consent and anonymity forms were sent to interviewees prior to the interviews to safeguard the process and encourage open and transparent conversations. Interviews were held virtually, each typically lasting between 45 minutes and one hour, and were recorded and transcribed, then qualitatively analysed.

3.1.2 Community focus groups in Ermelo, Mpumalanga and Motherwell, Eastern Cape

Focus groups were conducted with community representatives in Ermelo, Mpumalanga and Motherwell, Eastern Cape, as these provinces are epicentres of the just transition due to their significance in the coal and automotive industry value chains, respectively.

Focus groups are guided group discussions where emphasis is on interaction within the group (Bryman, 2008). They are used to elicit viewpoints from participants to understand their views before designing an intervention (Ayala and Elder, 2011). Group dynamics and deliberation can also widen the topic of discussion and lead to new insights in ways that individual interviews may not. For this study, focus groups were valuable for generating insights into sociocultural, political and other dynamics within the communities, which are critical to understand when designing effective stakeholder engagement. The design of focus groups is crucial to creating an environment that encourages dialogue and honest discussion and requires facilitators to skilfully guide the discussion away from conflict and irrelevant points without leading the discussion in particular directions (Evidence Base, 2006).

Ermelo is one of four towns which contribute “over 70 percent of South Africa’s total value added from coal” (Makgetla et.al, 2022:5). Prior to this study taking place, no PCC-led engagements for the just transition had been conducted in Ermelo or the greater Gert Sibande District Municipality. In organising and inviting participants to the focus group engagements in Ermelo, ICLEI Africa sought assistance from

Khuthala Environmental Care Group, a local community-based organisation (CBO) with extensive experience in the area. Khuthala played a crucial role in identifying potential participants from the community and connecting them with ICLEI Africa. Three focus group sessions were held at the Wesselton Chambers venue as it was easy for participants to access, and provided a suitable quiet and private space for discussion.

Motherwell is a township situated in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. The Nelson Mandela Metro is one of the key sites of South Africa's automotive industry and for the transition from manufacturing internal combustion engines vehicles to electric vehicles (EVs). ICLEI Africa sought assistance from the Hand in Hand Visual Art Gallery to organise focus groups, who played a crucial role in reaching out to potential participants from the community. Three focus group sessions were held at the Motherwell Community and Enviro Hub, a new and growing environmental education hub which was a suitable and safe space to encourage robust discussions.

Consent and anonymity forms were given to participants to safeguard the process and encourage open and transparent conversations. Focus groups were audio-recorded and detailed notes were taken throughout the sessions by supporting facilitators. Focus groups in Ermelo were conducted in a mix of English and isiZulu, and in Motherwell in English and isiXhosa.

During the focus groups, participants were asked to write their answers on sticky notes (using any language) in response to several questions, in order to encourage critical thinking and input from each individual. Participants took turns sharing their answers with the group, which generated debate and raised additional topics.

Organising and holding focus groups proved to be valuable but time intensive. Working with local organisations, and providing finance to cover transport costs were important for ensuring good turnout and active participation.

3.2 Data analysis: Qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups

Interview and focus group data were analysed alongside a review of relevant documents. The multiple methods and data used for the study supported triangulation and verification.

Data analysis was predominantly based on thematic analysis to interpret the rich datasets that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis is a question-driven process which is guided by clearly-expressed lines of inquiry focused on identifying, analysing, and presenting patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). An inductive (allowing the data to determine the themes) and semantic (analysing the explicit content of the data) analysis approach was used during the thematic analysis to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of the views expressed.

Roughly 30 hours of interview recordings were obtained, as well as nine hours of focus group recordings. Text from transcripts and notes was divided into subsections in relation to the research [objectives](#) and emerging themes. This technique helped to capture and identify common and dominant ideas, as well as outliers and divergent viewpoints.

Certain social partner groups (e.g. labour union representatives, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and local government) were not directly engaged in the study due to challenges with securing interviews. However, analysis is inclusive of these social partners through secondary research and drawing on examples provided by other interviewees.

4 Unpacking the research: Key findings and insights

This section discusses the key research findings summarised by Figure 3 below. The interviews and focus groups included representatives from all major social partners (with the exception of labour) from the four sectors of interest, namely: electricity, new energy vehicles, green hydrogen, and skills. The sections that follow are structured according to the following themes: the interpretations of South Africa's just transition; stakeholder perspectives on just transition engagement processes; building trust and addressing mistrust in the just transition; and building consensus and addressing contestation in the just transition.

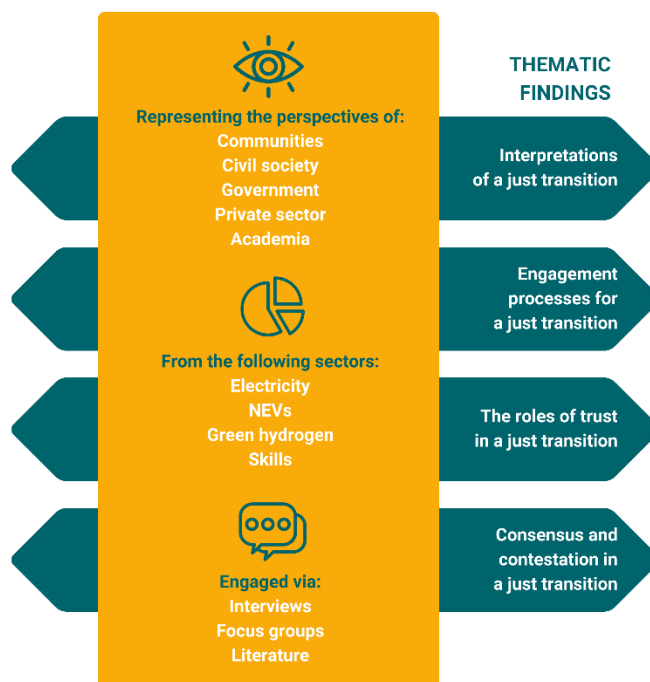


Figure 3: Overview of social partners, sectors and data sources that informed the report's findings (Source: Authors' own)

4.1 Interpretations of South Africa's just transition

Much of the work on a just transition in South Africa has been framed at the national level, which has been valuable for establishing a coherent and coordinated vision and roadmap. However, interviewees, particularly from academia and civil society, highlighted that there is not 'one just transition', but multiple 'just transitions' playing out simultaneously, cutting across sectors and interacting with one another across scales. The point being made was that the coherent vision and roadmap needs to acknowledge and make space for these different transitions, diverse range of priorities and multiple ways of knowing. Table 2 below gives an overview of the divergent interpretations of the purpose of a just transition and a pathway for moving forward.

Table 2: Individual interviewee's interpretations of the purpose and plan for South Africa's just transition

Theme	Individual interviewee's sentiments
Purpose of a just transition	<p>The just transition is about more than just changing technology. For example, it includes thinking about livelihoods, health, and the effect of the pace and scale of decommissioning on economic development.</p> <p>We have to reduce greenhouse gas levels to mitigate global warming while simultaneously addressing unemployment and inequality.</p> <p>The just transition must primarily address developmental objectives.</p> <p>The just transition must include a focus on community ownership models and tangible grassroots-level solutions for people.</p> <p>Energy security and achieving universal energy access are key to the just transition.</p> <p>The just transition is about renewable energy: "We've got to invest in renewables".</p>
Plan and pathway of a just transition	<p>While "everybody" supports the just transition, people have different ideas of what the transition requires and should look like over time. For example, while all or most energy-industry interviewees recognised the need for a decarbonised energy mix, there is no consensus on what that mix should consist of.</p> <p>There is disagreement regarding how broad or narrow the definition of the just transition should be. The definition should encompass deep transformation, revolution, and a "new economy" that has the capacity to benefit all of South Africa.</p> <p>Progress in the just transition is greatly held back by crime and corruption in both society and government.</p> <p>Greater knowledge exchange and information sharing between countries undergoing transition can assist South Africa's transition process.</p>

A key message that emerged from interviewees is the need for greater collaboration between the PCC and all sectors, as well as more engagement between sectors in navigating the just transition. To further consensus, new energy vehicle sector interviewees suggested that the PCC could increase collaboration with existing forums, industry experts and networks, to harness a wider and more diverse set of inputs. Several interviewees spoke of the need for greater collaboration and integration across sectors in supporting the just transition, rather than the predominant siloed approach. This would require increased inter-sectoral communication, coordination structures (such as the database of social partners) and could also be supported by targeted funding supporting cross-sectoral collaboration. There is a role for the PCC to play in supporting this, particularly through stakeholder engagements and existing and future projects, but it also requires the work of government and other social partners.

4.1.1 Civil society: A broader conception of a just transition that centres on justice

The responses from civil society predominantly includes the views expressed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations, and the youth. NGOs, particularly those representing faith-based communities, drew attention to their broader understanding of a just transition than that of the PCC and the four sectors identified by the JET IP, which included governance, ending energy poverty, addressing injustices of climate change (in that those least responsible for the problem are most vulnerable to its impacts), and promoting fairness and inclusion of these marginalised communities. The vision articulated by these interviewees centred on justice through addressing the

energy crisis, unemployment, environmental destruction, and rights-based approaches to drive development goals, address poverty, and deliver services. An emphasis was put on bottom-up approaches to unlock the agency of communities, as one interviewee explained: *“Communities are best placed to bring about their own development objectives.”* And while they saw the JET IP as an important piece of the puzzle, they expressed: *“The just energy transition investment plan is a lovely first step, but that's all it is. It keeps us on the map geopolitically.”*

The interviewees representing youth expressed the need to go back to questioning the fundamentals of a just transition, as one interviewee noted, *“People don't necessarily know how far and deep the issues of needing a just transition goes; it's both the capitalism aspect, colonialism, racism and inequitable distribution and emissions.”* A core concern expressed was the need for a just transition to protect jobs and livelihoods, and that areas that rely on high-carbon sectors and industries *“must not be left to be ghost towns”* as a result of the move from coal to renewable energy. Other priorities expressed included: energy security, safe and accessible public transport, job opportunities and economic growth. Foreign direct investment was welcomed due to inadequate domestic sources for supporting a just transition. While the JET IP is attracting foreign capital, youth interviewees expressed concern that the JET IP's focus on green hydrogen and new energy vehicles will benefit South Africa's trade partners more than the South African people. A risk identified was youth being uninformed about the potential of a just transition and missing out on business and job opportunities, and being susceptible to misinformation. This revealed the importance of awareness raising and skills development to equip the youth to proactively participate in, and shape a just transition – a theme that was reiterated by interviewees representing academia. As one youth interviewee remarked,

“*The whole conversation, to make it fashionable for young people, I think it's really to provide them with opportunities. Because without opportunities, you know, you can converse with young people, but if you don't give them opportunities for skills development, opportunities for funding, opportunities for capacitation, then really, I think, for me, you will speak over them, because what they really need is specifically those things that can really transform and change their lives.*”

4.1.2 Academia: Curriculum change and skills development for a just transition

A core point raised by interviewees from academia was that a just transition is not singular but that multiple transitions make up South Africa's national just transition, and that it must go beyond a narrow focus on electricity and the JET IP sectors, to include agriculture and tourism, as well as skills development as a central enabler to a just transition.

Interviewees from the higher education sector highlighted the need to change the curriculum to support the demands of a just transition, for which the Department of Higher Education and Training with other departments, Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) colleges, universities, and various industry bodies will have to lead. One example is the work being led by the Chemistry Department at Nelson Mandela University, which works with the University's EV programme uYilo, as part of a national programme supporting the development of the country's EV infrastructure. The Department has begun to update its curriculum to meet the changing needs, as described by one interviewee,

“*We are busy changing our curriculum activities to look at the transition into what we call the Fourth Industrial Revolution... because the modern students' job description is going to be very different to say 10 years ago and even present.*”

Elements of the skills development relate to computer skills as well as skills for emerging sectors, such as EV charging infrastructure, EV components, renewable energy, and battery technology.

Furthermore, the Department is looking at introducing short courses, to ensure that those interested but not able to take the full course are accommodated. This demonstrates the importance of flexible and diverse offerings in terms of content and format, to reduce the barriers to skills development, and to build the critical mass of skills needed to drive and accelerate a just transition. Given the urgency and scale of change that needs to occur, the slow processes of the Department of Higher Education and Training to enact curriculum change was a real concern expressed.

Another key issue raised was the need for a concerted and coordinated approach to planning and developing a skills ecosystem to support the just transition, given the generally low just transition-compatible skills levels in the country. Furthermore, given the structure of South Africa's economy, a substantial portion of skills are located in fossil fuel sectors. Therefore, reskilling will be essential to establish the necessary skills base to support a just transition. Interviewees from academia suggested that the PCC engage the Department of Higher Education and Training, SETAs, and universities, to ensure a coordinated approach to skills development. Centres such as Rhodes University's Environmental and Learning Centre, and Wits University's Centre for Researching Education and Labour have co-authored the following book: "Green Skills Research in South Africa: Models, Cases and Methods" (Roseberg et.al 2023), which studies green economy and sustainability transitions. They propose a green economy learning assessment methodology that assesses value chains of several industries, and maps out where the hotspots are in terms of transitioning into new sectors and transitioning out of fossil fuel-based sectors. The methodology allows sectors to begin to forecast which skills will need to grow as certain value chains diversify and expand, and which will be phased out.

Knowledge broker or intermediary institutions whose role is under-acknowledged and under-resourced, play a pivotal role in translating academic and other research findings in ways that are relevant and understandable for the public, and useful for policymakers, as well as connecting local knowledge to policy spaces. This role is essential for enhancing the uptake of evidence and findings coming from academia (see Box 4.1 below).

Box 4.1. Defining and understanding the role of knowledge brokers



Knowledge brokers act as the link between producers and users of knowledge, to facilitate the dissemination, exchange, co-production and use of relevant information for changes in policy and practice (CDKN, 2021:2).

The role of knowledge brokers is becoming increasingly critical in the context of pressing climate change challenges – they are required to “navigate a complex environment encompassing a range of sectors and stakeholders with different values and priorities, at multiple levels (Scodanibbio et al, 2023:755).

Interviewees also highlighted the need for school curricula to equip learners to respond to the new skills demands of climate change and a just transition, and the role that - equipped with the right skills and knowledge - children can play in raising awareness in their families and communities. This is important for building the next generations of thinkers who can drive a just transition, and the catalytic effect education can have. At the same time, it is an unrealistic expectation for the PCC, and more

appropriate for the South African government and its relevant departments to enact the kind of curriculum changes being discussed.

A final role of academia, highlighted by an interviewee from the EV sector, was how it could contribute to tangibly demonstrating and communicating the opportunities of a just transition. Here it was felt that social science has a key role to play:

“A key strategy to creating awareness, developing knowledge and generating excitement is by demonstrating the importance practically through projects. The Department has been trying for several years to create awareness, develop knowledge and generate excitement in terms of what can be done through technology. It has a project in a rural community in Alicedale, Eastern Cape, where they have set up and are trying to integrate a solar panel, battery, wind turbine and an electric charger. The technology works, but the biggest challenge is the social aspect.”

The impact of technology is determined by the level of social buy-in and ownership. Changing people's minds and behaviour is a complex process, for which social science has key insights. This is an area in which gains could be made, should the social sciences be given a meaningful seat at the table of the just transition discussion.

4.1.3 Private sector: Policy uncertainty, engaging with a just transition, and lack of an enabling environment

The private sector is made up of a diverse range of subsectors that have been involved to varying extents in the just transition. An interviewee from the banking sector indicated that the just transition and climate risk is understood within the private sector, but that it could be better mainstreamed, so that the sector sees its involvement in the just transition as a core part of its work, not an add-on. A concern expressed was that “*projects associated with the just transition are often not commercially viable*”, and this limits the banking sector's appetite to contribute to the just transition as they are unwilling to take on unfamiliar risk associated with just transition projects. Greater collaboration with government was highlighted as a priority for the banking sector to enhance its understanding of how it fits into the just transition, how it can contribute through finding innovative financing mechanisms, and strengthening the commercial viability of just transition projects. A concrete opportunity was identified through the funding received through the JET IP, with an interviewee noting that “*this funding can be lent to the banks at a concessional rate to fund projects that are aligned to the just transition.*” The sector also wants to play a bigger role in the finalisation of the Just Transition Financing Mechanism (PCC, 2023) and its implementation.

A legal sector interviewee saw the sector's role as developing a supporting legislative framework – focusing on what legislation needs to be amended and enforced to facilitate the implementation of the just transition. The legal sector is involved in numerous initiatives to ensure that their clients observe and align their work to just transition policies, laws and principles, but the interviewee felt that more structured engagements between the legal sector and the PCC and government would bear fruit. The promulgation of the Climate Change Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2022) into an Act will be a significant development for the sector as it will provide the legislative basis for implementing a just transition in South Africa.

Interviewees from the oil and gas sectors felt they had not been engaged enough by the PCC and that just transition documents make no reference to these sectors. Part of the criticism was that the transition has been too narrowly focused around electricity and Eskom, and that the PCC should open

up their engagement beyond “narrow” renewable-energy messaging, and include social partners with divergent views to avoid creating “echo chambers”. The diversity of engagements run by the PCC does however seem to reflect a genuine attempt to include divergent perspectives.

4.2 Perspectives of social partners on just transition engagement processes

4.2.1 The centrality of robustness and inclusivity

Nearly all interviewees spoke about the role and importance of stakeholder engagement for ensuring a just transition. Representing the views of social partners, creating buy-in, and enabling social partners to actively participate in shaping the transition were all frequently highlighted. Stakeholder engagement is a wide-ranging research area. The lack of a shared understanding of the key aspects of stakeholder engagement can hinder operationalisation, legitimacy and practical relevance (Suddaby, 2010; Kujala et al., 2022). Kujala et al. (2022) propose that stakeholder engagement consists of three key components: moral, strategic and pragmatic. Moral aims include, legitimacy, fairness, trust, responsibility, environmental and sustainability concerns, and enhancing inclusive stakeholder engagement. Strategic aims include, improved financial and operational performance, and environmental and social risk management. Pragmatic aims include strengthened stakeholder relationships, collaboration, dialogue, knowledge co-generation, problem-solving, reaching consensus, and resolving conflicts of interest (Kujala et al., 2022).

Across interviews, the following purposes emerged as being of central importance to effective stakeholder engagement:

- Creating awareness and sharing information (as well as mitigating misinformation);
- Building trust between social partners and leadership authorities;
- Facilitating constructive conversations that allow for building consensus; and
- Creating buy-in, support, and ownership through enabling participation.

4.2.2 Two-way engagement to actively involve social partners

One-way engagement involves information being shared in one direction only (AccountAbility, 2015), whereas with two-way engagement information is exchanged in both directions, and is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity (Kujala et al., 2022). When participating in PCC-led stakeholder engagements for the just transition, interviewees and focus group participants expected that they were entering into two-way engagements with opportunities for open and constructive discussion. However, concerns were raised about the one-sided nature of some PCC engagements:

- Allowing limited time for questions, discussion and feedback post PCC inputs is needed. An interviewee explained that “*simply informing social partners*” of plans “*does not qualify*” as meaningful engagement or obtaining buy-in.

“*These dialogues [that the PCC has] – so-called dialogues – are important because they're putting into the public space important debates. But they are webinars, they are not dialogues. ... [The PCC] gets somebody to present something, people get an opportunity to ask a few questions, and [the PCC] answers those questions. That's not a discussion amongst people. And, you know, we need to make these things turn into meetings, not webinars.*”

- Engagements being tightly controlled, with certain questions to the presenters being denied by members of the PCC Secretariat, limits trust-building while positioning the PCC “as a gatekeeper rather than a service to the public”.

Interviewees and focus group participants expressed the desire for more meaningful two-way engagements. They highlighted the need for greater clarity on the type of engagement, and the aims, expectations and expected outcomes of each engagement, to be communicated prior to events.

In the context of in-person, technical-level engagements, the PCC Secretariat was described by an energy-sector interviewee as “unwilling” to take stakeholder comments into consideration, as well as being “defensive”. An example was given where the PCC presented on energy modelling work and received technical critique, which they appeared to disregard without substantiation. Others held more positive views, such as interviewees from academia who shared their experiences of working with the PCC on technical research projects, for which engagement between the parties was ongoing and collaborative. They described the PCC as “very hands-on”, actively involved in capacity-building and relationship-building. With these “broad” and “useful” engagement efforts going “beyond” just consultation, the outcome was realistic research for the just transition. Other technical experts, and youth representative, described PCC-held workshops as two-way processes in which social partners were both informed and invited to provide inputs.

Interviewees suggested that transparent feedback from the PCC would help motivate social partners to invest their time in engaging constructively. As an interviewee from academia remarked, “I think that also people are a bit sick of being listened to, and then there's no consequence, and they can't see what the impact of them spending their time might be.” Interviewees acknowledged that tangible results and outcomes based on feedback may not arise immediately, but that it is imperative for the PCC to keep the channels of communication open, so that when outcomes are reached, this is promptly relayed to social partners.

4.2.3 Accessibility, resources and capacities for stakeholder inclusivity

Accessibility of engagements, related to the capacities and resources of social partners, was instrumental in determining the level of inclusivity of PCC engagements. Accessibility is not only about whether someone is invited to an engagement but also the accessibility of the terminology and language. An interviewee representing youth explained that PCC presentations are at times complex and use highly technical language without explanation of terminology used. Interviewees felt that different languages should be used during engagements, considering that South Africa has 12 official languages, and that language interpretation could be added to Zoom sessions. Another dimension of accessibility raised by a civil society interviewee was for the PCC to engage more directly with marginalised groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities, and co-create strategies to enhance their inclusion. Figure 4 below shows how capacity can enable both knowledge production and inclusive engagement. In turn, knowledge production can also enable inclusive engagement, which itself enables the building of buy-in and support.

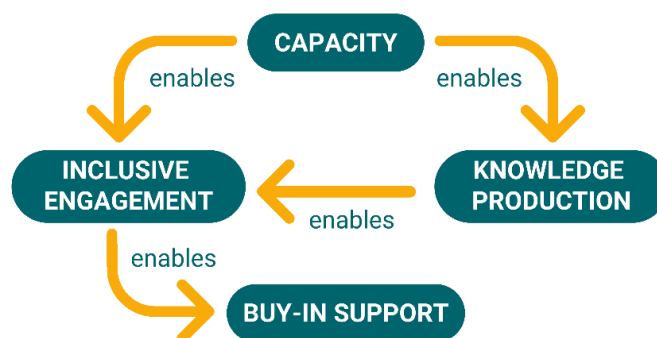


Figure 4: The interactions between capacity, knowledge production, inclusive engagement, and buy-in and support
(Source: Authors' own)

Capacity and resource constraints were discussed as determinants of inclusion and included a lack of: (a) knowledge and understanding, (b) time, and (c) financial resources. A key part of capacity was the ability for social partners to represent their interests in the terms recognised by the process. Focus group participants voiced concerns around financial constraints (e.g. to get to engagements, time away from economic opportunities) and the physical distance that needs to be travelled by communities to attend consultations, which posed serious barriers to their participation. These themes are showcased in Table 3 using a selection of quotes from interviewees.

Table 3: Quotations from interviewees and related themes regarding capacity and resources

Quotation	Relevant themes	Social partner
1 “One of the things that really ... needs to happen is that there needs to be an energy systems/energy transitions 101 on the technical aspects of transition for non-technical people ... To improve their capacity to also be involved in the decision making. Then at the same time ... people who have those technical insights can't assume that they understand other social factors, whether that be around just governance or more broadly around the role that we want energy to play in our society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building knowledge and understanding of different aspects of the just transition Links to Section 4.6.2 regarding valuing diverse knowledge. 	Civil society (NGOs), academia
2 “Public discourse needs to be shaped through social engagement, through collaborative exploration of options in this space – both in terms of the ideas that shape different options, but also through concrete experimentation. And the buy-in comes from this process. The buy-in does not come from ‘you don't allow people’, and ‘you shape the resources to think critically’.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources need to build capacity of the public Links to Section 4.5 regarding building buy-in for the just transition. 	Civil society (NGOs), academia
3 “I understand that there's targeted consultation processes that need to happen, but they should be involving the on-the-ground organisations that have been working with communities around issues of resources and energy and mining ... Those organisations are far from well-supported. The work to just raise the capacity of communities to advocate for themselves and to generate the knowledge that they require for decision making ... is woefully under supported. There's huge inequality there and I think it has devastating consequences on the quality of participation that we see from different actors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge generation capacity of communities and CBOs Advocacy capacity of communities Quality of engagement Inclusion of existing organisations that work in and/or represent communities 	Civil society (NGOs), academia

Opportunities for knowledge-sharing and capacity-strengthening of community members, CBOs and other parts of civil society, particularly those that have been historically marginalised, was emphasised. Interviewees suggested that the quality of engagements could be improved through separating engagements into two parts: an informative session followed by a session for feedback and discussion. Focus group participants were most vocal in raising the need for frequent and continuous engagement. Both civil society interviewees and focus group participants highlighted the need for strategies to address the major resource inequalities that exist, which could include support to attend meetings (for example, people could apply to a central fund resourced by philanthropies and the private sector) to fund participation in events, and educational resources which communities could use to inform decision making. [Box 4.2](#) below presents insights shared by one participant on the consequences of social partners being excluded due to lack of capacity and resources. The focus on labour unions is an important one given the central but complex roles they play in the just transition.

The perceived over-ambitious and fast-paced approach of the PCC was critiqued by academia, faith representatives, and other civil society interviewees as preventing thorough and effective stakeholder engagement processes. It was, however, also recognised that thorough stakeholder engagement can be time intensive and may thus hinder progress that is urgently needed. This links to the global challenge of the need to act with urgency and the need for adequate time to meaningfully re-envision and proactively plan for resilient, low-carbon societies that meet the needs of a culturally diverse population (Roberts and Spires, 2023; Scodanibbio et al, 2023). While robust engagement is imperative, it would be naïve to suggest that simply more consultation and greater transparency will solve all issues, or lead to perfect consensus. An equal imperative to consulting is to act, particularly given the urgency of the crises South Africa is facing. Leadership must be given the license to act and then be held accountable by their electorate, rather than endless consultation that avoids real action. Furthermore, along with the PCC, social partners and government hold mutual responsibility to abide by a common set of principles when engaging, so that common ground can be established to guide action. It would be unrealistic for this to be the sole responsibility of the PCC.

Box 4.2: Reflecting on the consequences of stakeholder capacity for participation



I think that's also why you see some social partners ... almost taking this position of being really almost defiant and oppositional by default: Not really having access to the resources, both in terms of the capacity and other resources that might be needed, money, etc, to undertake the research that might also allow them to participate more fully, more robustly and less obstructively in the transition.

Let's think about the unions, right, because often people say that they're oppositional. ... The unions in South Africa are the bodies that have given us, by and large, the labour rights that we take for granted in this country. There's such an emphasis on framing the unions as problematic, when we haven't even thought about what a society without powerful unions looks like. Our climate change agenda that we have now is very strongly driven from inside the labour unions as well. ... Why are [unions] demonized? Have we thought about what we stand to lose if they are not strong, and if they don't have strong internal capacity? We've seen a hollowing out of even knowledge production capacity within the unions right now ... they do not have the resources that they used to have. What does that mean in terms of their capacity to undertake the sort of robust research work that is required to inform their different positions?

4.3 Community focus groups' perceptions of a just transition and the PCC's community engagements

This section is slightly different from the preceding sections as it focuses exclusively on focus group responses to showcase perspectives from the ground that are often marginalised in national fora.

4.3.1 Community focus groups' perceptions of a just transition

Focus group participants highlighted the link between climate change and just transitions and identified coal-based power as a cause of pollution and climate change based on their lived realities. In Ermelo, this included air pollution and acid mine drainage associated with coal power plants and mining, which is having negative health impacts such as respiratory illnesses, and is damaging crops too. The perception of the community was that mine owners make little effort to rehabilitate mining-affected land, which could be repurposed and used for farming. Identified climate change impacts included shifting rainfall patterns, droughts and floods, all threatening food security.

In Motherwell, focus group participants felt that climate change will disproportionately affect poor communities due to the lack of understanding about its causes and impacts, and therefore limited preparedness to deal with the impending impacts. Participants explained that climate change is affecting their communities through drought that affects dam levels and leads to water restrictions, and frequent heavy rains leading to flooding. Polluting industrial companies surrounding Motherwell were singled out as having a responsibility for information sharing and supporting education about climate change, due to their role in causing it.

Overall, participants across all focus groups had limited understanding of the just transition, which was mainly attributed to limited local level consultation. Environmental and social justice activists in Ermelo had the most detailed knowledge and understanding of the just transition due to more exposure to the topic and participation in PCC engagements. This is largely because Ermelo is situated in the coal belt of the country, and has become a just transition 'hotspot'. Perceptions about a just transition in Ermelo mainly centred around emissions reductions, moving away from a fossil-fuel based economy, and shifting to the green economy with its associated job opportunities. Participants in the environmental organisation focus group in Ermelo were most knowledgeable about and emphasised the importance of "justness" and "justice" meaning that there should be: investments in people's health, compensation for negative socioeconomic impacts of the transition, and addressing of existing inequalities and poverty. The principle of *leaving no one behind* was highlighted as important, particularly for marginalised social groups and informal sectors, so that they reap the benefits of a just transition. Still, several participants expressed concern that the just transition has been decided on and conveyed in a 'top-down' manner to communities. Some expressed antagonism towards the just transition as a "Western" concept based on "Western" research, and emphasised that faith, religious, and indigenous knowledge systems are equally important as science, and that these require more meaningful consideration in just transition engagements and decision making. There was also a mistrust of the foreign funding sources that was expressed. As one participant exclaimed, "*it is daylight robbery*", referring to developed countries, who have benefitted from coal for many years, now wanting to prevent South Africa from doing so. One of the sources of antagonism was the limited knowledge and understanding of the just transition and a fear of the unknown. As a result, communities tended to focus on risks rather than opportunities related to a just transition. For instance, from the perspective of communities, dependence on renewable energy may result in further reduced, intermittent and unreliable electricity supply, which could exacerbate existing energy insecurity and electricity

inequalities. Several participants were concerned that the new opportunities linked to the just transition will benefit *outsiders*, rather than local communities.

In contrast, the just transition concept was new to the majority of participants in Motherwell, with little knowledge about its implications for the automotive industry in the area. Once the just transition was explained by facilitators (linking it to the automotive industry), participants expressed concerns about job losses, but also recognised that new jobs could be created via this transition. Participants raised concerns about how the decommissioning of Komati has led to an increase in social ills and violent clashes in the area, and that it is impossible to stop using coal completely, due to its many purposes, but it must be used in a way that protects people's health and the environment.

4.3.2 Focus group reflections on stakeholder engagements

Several Ermelo focus group participants indicated that they have participated in PCC community engagements to varying degrees. They explained that it is difficult to travel to venues located long distances from communities due to financial and time burdens. An example cited was the short notice for an event in Komati in October 2023, where a participant had to walk a considerable distance from Ermelo before getting a lift to Komati. Several participants explained that not everyone has access to social media platforms where events are often advertised at short notice. This has an impact on communities' abilities to effectively mobilise and prepare for engagements.

Participants in Motherwell have not been directly engaged by the PCC to date, and were of the opinion that the PCC should begin regular engagements with them. Informal settlements were identified as needing more attention, and innovative ways of engaging, particularly to address coordination challenges. Focus group engagements in Ermelo revealed that every community has some sort of structure for communication, no matter how formal or informal, but in Motherwell a lack of social cohesion and unity posed challenges for consultation. The following paragraphs outline suggestions provided by focus group participants for more effective community engagement for a just transition.

Frequent community engagements to raise awareness and to educate communities was identified as a priority, which could include the creation of "just transition forums" to facilitate collaborative, democratic, honest and open engagements at the local and district municipal levels. Nominated representatives from these forums could also collaborate with representatives from other forums to facilitate information and knowledge sharing, which could be supplemented by a "roadshow outreach programme" to visit diverse areas across the country. It was also suggested that the PCC form a coordinating and facilitation substructure that can be trained to mobilise, organise, create awareness and prepare communities for PCC engagements. This could include establishing community-based facilitators who could lead information gathering, mobilise people for engagements, and give and receive feedback, thus acting as a link between the PCC and communities. Ideas surfaced about how to strengthen information dissemination including community WhatsApp groups, pamphlets and posters, and radio. A notable outcome of the focus groups held was that participants agreed to continue meeting regularly to engage on climate change and just transition related topics and set up a WhatsApp group. This group noted that with sufficient capacitation, training and skills, they would be able to spearhead solution-oriented discussions climate change and the just transition in their communities and help prepare them for future engagements with the PCC and others.

While social media is a useful tool, access is not universal, making alternative sources of information necessary as well as utilising existing structures, such as religious groups and sports clubs. In Motherwell the community has shown an ability to come together to tackle issues, and they now meet

regularly at a local park to discuss crime, service delivery, gender-based violence, and development issues. The meetings are solution oriented and issues are usually taken up and led by the community. There is an opportunity to build on such existing structures for just transition engagements.

Creating a database of organisations in the community, to support communication prior to holding events was highlighted by participants as a way to remain in touch with the necessary groups. Participants highlighted their ongoing frustrations of 'tick-the-box engagements' and that clear commitments and timeliness for initiatives and expected outcomes are required and need to be effectively communicated. Finally, it was generally agreed that the PCC needs to provide at least two weeks' notice regarding engagements to allow sufficient time for planning and mobilising. The following suggestions on how the community can be better informed and engaged included:

- Case studies could be shared with communities on places where the just transition has been implemented with success, presenting practical information to understand what the just transition could entail for Ermelo;
- Decisions must not be made for communities without consulting them;
- The just transition process must "*not be sugar-coated*" - meaning that the process of engaging communities on the just transition must be rooted in honesty and transparency;
- Local municipal leaders and councillors need to be capacitated on climate change and just transition topics, as the government tier closest to community members; and
- Support for and access to just transition focused careers must be created through appropriate school education.

Importantly, these activities are not the sole responsibility of the PCC, but require the participation of the South African government, the private sector and civil society to work together to promote a just transition.

4.4 PCC Secretariat perspectives on their just transition engagement processes

The PCC Secretariat interviewees saw their role and mandate as supporting South Africa's just transition to a climate-resilient and low-carbon economy and society, by consulting widely, sharing information, creating awareness, and working towards social consensus on the just transition. Several PCC Secretariat interviewees raised concerns about the PCC's limitations as an advisory body to support implementation of plans and facilitate a just transition, remarking, "The PCC presents plans, but nothing is happening. I don't know how the PCC can change this as we are just an advisory body". In contrast, another PCC Secretariat member expressed a view that the PCC's "boldness and transparency has changed social partners' perceptions about the PCC."

The PCC plays a key brokering role by convening national conversations and acting as a translator of data and research, as one interviewee reflected:

“ My big concern is you actually can't use the research community as a boundary object or bridging community because they're not able to simplify the message appropriately. I always remember those charts that they gave me. I'm pretty numerate. It took me like 15 minutes to work out what on earth this chart was saying. And once I worked it out, it was an incredible chart, but it is completely useless outside of a very specific group of people. So part of the role of the PCC in this space is to be that kind of translator.

Therefore, the challenge for the PCC is to tailor the messages coming from research towards the needs of the public and policymakers, so that a robust and meaningful conversation about the evidence can be held between diverse actor groups. The challenge is also for research organisations to effectively communicate research in a meaningful and understandable way for a diverse audience to support uptake. This type of boundary work of communication and translation to enhance relevance and credibility, has also been highlighted by the literature investigating how to increase the impact of knowledge on policy and action (Cash et al., 2003; Cash et al., 2020).

4.4.1 The challenges around conducting effective stakeholder engagement

Since its formation, the PCC has made a valuable contribution to South Africa's national conversation around a just transition by holding stakeholder engagement processes for South Africa's Updated NDC (PCC, 2021a), the Just Transition Framework (PCC, 2022b), the JET IP (PCC, 2023a), as well as engagements on specific recommendation reports. While their contribution has been significant, they have also encountered challenges. As one PCC interviewee commented: *"stakeholder engagements are relatively ad hoc and the driver for these is not always clear."* Budgetary and human capacity constraints have contributed to the ad hoc nature of engagements. Additionally, the PCC sometimes tries to deal with multiple issues per engagement, and this impacts the ability to have *"robust engagements and a very robust process of tracking what topics were raised, by which stakeholder and how we have engaged what social partners have said."* Another PCC Secretariat representative resonated with this view stating that *"time, capacity and budget constraints have the ability to make the engagement process flawed in making an impact e.g. the assumption is that by holding one engagement in a province, that [this] adequately captures and represents the views of communities in the entire province, whereas that is not the reality."* These constraints impact on the efforts of the PCC to run inclusive processes and raises the importance of the PCC to shift to holding more structured, regular engagements with social partners, balanced with the availability of resources, and collaborating with government and social partners also running engagements on the just transition. Another element that PCC Secretariat interviewees indicated they were struggling with, was the siloed ways of working in the different PCC work streams, which needs to be addressed to enhance coherence and communication within the Secretariat. An example that was cited was the varied approaches to soliciting data and feedback from social partners and communities. Some work streams explained how they have robust methods for collecting data and eliciting feedback, including informal ways outside of formal stakeholder consultations, whereas for other work streams this was less clear. Collaboration, sharing of information and approaches between the different workstreams will be important for driving learning and minimising duplication of efforts.

PCC interviewees indicated that the stakeholder engagements drew on research, the work of expert groups, and typically sought to grapple with current and long-term issues. Given the technical nature of many of the problems that the PCC seeks to address, technical knowledge is often foregrounded. One of the risks of this approach, is it marginalises other forms of knowledge such as local, traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, which are important, particularly for representing the views of communities. The point being made by interviewees was not that different forms of knowledge should be pitted against each other, rather there needs to be the space and recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, to inform the development of solutions to address the diverse needs of social partners. As one PCC Secretariat interviewee noted: *"experts in communities know what communities want, communities know what they need, both perspectives (western and indigenous knowledge systems) are needed."*

4.4.2 The role of subnational government in realising a just transition

Including local governments has been another challenge of the process according to interviewees from the PCC Secretariat, which has in some cases led to local governments being resistant to the just transition work led by the PCC. The Just Transition Framework, JET IP, JET Implementation Plan, and Climate Change Bill all detail the roles that subnational government will need to play in implementing South Africa's just transition, and the importance of the alignment of their work with the national level.

Multilevel governance – decision-making done via meaningful collaboration between different 'levels' of government – is essential for supporting a transition that is sustainable and just (ICLEI Africa, 2021; CityTalk, 2023). Subnational governments, especially municipalities, are at the coalface of the transition and closest to communities impacted, and are thus strategically positioned to contextualise and support its implementation and to ensure the just transition and delivering of services occur hand-in-hand (Krawchenko et al, 2021). Just as the PCC is a key knowledge broker in the just transition, so are subnational governments, who play key bridge-building and translation roles, between themselves, communities and national government, and implement local policies and plans based on national guidance, best available science and community inputs.

However, subnational governments (especially intermediate municipalities) face barriers that hinder their role in South Africa's just transition, such as inadequate resources, limited direct engagement in nationally-led just transition conversations, the service delivery focus of municipalities, and limited knowledge on how a municipality can steer its own just transition. One of the challenges that local governments have to deal with was observable in how communities at times use PCC engagement processes to raise service delivery complaints. PCC interviewees felt that this had the effect of steering these engagements away from climate change and a just transition. While this may be true, it is important that service delivery, climate change and the just transition are not understood as mutually exclusive issues. Rather a just transition must demonstrate how it can improve service delivery in ways that promote justice, are climate resilient, and mitigate the causes of climate change (Cartwright et al., 2023). This points to the need for the PCC and even more importantly, different spheres of government to work in an integrated manner towards collaborative planning and executing their combined mandates that seek to realise a just transition. The Just Transition Framework provides guidance to enable effective governance for a just transition, while the Local Government Toolbox for a Just Energy Transition (Hermanus et. al, 2022) developed by the Trade Industry Policy Strategies (TIPS), is a valuable resource that could be drawn on. The value of the toolkit is that it provides a set of tools, interventions, and mechanisms to help local government facilitate and work towards achieving procedural, distributive and restorative justice, as well as planning and regulation, local revenue collection and budget, and spending on service delivery and infrastructure, all of which contribute to local economic development (Hermanus et. al, 2022). The JET IP provides useful guidance on the involvement of municipalities by highlighting the key roles that municipalities will need to play, as well as highlighting some of the technical, financial and economic challenges encountered by municipalities that need to be addressed (The Presidency, 2022).

The PCC acknowledges the roles of subnational governments in the transition, demonstrated by the selection of two PCC commissioners to represent this constituency - the mayors of Cape Town and Tswelopele Municipality. What is now required, and is currently being supported by SALGA and its subnational government partners (ICLEI, SACN and C40), is mechanisms with which these commissioners can hear from and give feedback to the 257 municipalities across the country.

4.4.3 Suggestions for strengthening stakeholder engagement

To address some of the challenges described, PCC Secretariat interviewees highlighted the need for the PCC to clearly communicate their approach and supporting rationale for engaging diverse social partners through some form of tailored engagement strategy, some of the features of which are described below:

- **Expert groups** whose work is valuable and enriches the work of the PCC. These groups could be engaged on a one-on-one basis.
- **Social partner groups**, which are large and need to be involved via capacity building, as this group does not always have the relevant expertise and understanding. The PCC's approach to developing the Electricity Planning Recommendations report (PCC, 2023b), is useful in terms of its use of evidence, transparency and capacity building, with one interviewee noting that *"breaking these engagements into two different sessions was useful."* The first session was a virtual capacity-building session, which was *"relatively one-way"* in terms of information flow and the second session was in-person. These were spaced out (two weeks apart), to allow social partners to have time to internalise the discussions, deepen engagements and develop mandates from their constituencies, all of which build trust in the PCC and its engagement processes.
- **Community and workers**, were identified as needing dedicated engagement processes to address a concern that the PCC *"is not convening the right people, it is convening through civil society networks which introduces a slight bias."* This finding was reiterated by the focus group discussions, which demonstrates that by giving communities and workers a dedicated and hospitable space, allows new insights to emerge that typically do not emerge in big national or provincial stakeholder processes, which many find intimidating.
- **PCC commissioners**, who have varying levels of expertise. It was suggested that the PCC needs to come up with ways to *"balance inputs from different sectors with the commissioners and build their capacity to respond to issues."*
- The **legislative arm of the state**, which is tasked with developing strategies for engaging and capacitating on the just transition.

To deliver a differentiated approach to engaging, the PCC needs to determine its objectives for engagements, the frequency of engagements, and tailor these according to how communities are organised. One suggestion by a Secretariat interviewee was that *"the PCC needs to closely collaborate and form a stakeholder consultation coordinating structure with partners that conduct community stakeholder engagements, to prevent stakeholder fatigue"* for which the role of a live, and regularly updated database of social partners would be valuable.

The main approaches to stakeholder engagements can be summarised into four categories, namely: to inform, consult, involve, and collaborate/participate (see Figure 5). The approach needs to be tailored according to the objectives of the engagement.

APPROACH	LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	EXAMPLES OF ENGAGEMENTS
Inform	One-way communication to inform or capacitate stakeholders	Announcements, policy and guidance documents, press releases, newsletters, guidelines
Consult	To gain information and feedback from stakeholders - usually in written format	Request for comment on draft policies and guidelines, and surveys
Involve	Direct interactions with stakeholders - two-way/multi-way communications, usually with the intention of both parties learning from the interaction	Stakeholder meetings/workshops, and public hearings
Collaborate/participate	Direct interactions with bi-directional or multidirectional communication; learning negotiation with all stakeholders involved; stakeholders work together and act	Initiatives, joint projects, and partnerships

Figure 5: Approaches to stakeholder engagement (Source: SAHPRA, 2019: 9)

4.5 Building trust and addressing mistrust in a just transition

This section explores factors identified by interviewees that build or break down trust in the just transition, as illustrated by Figure 6. These can provide guidance for the work of the PCC and others.

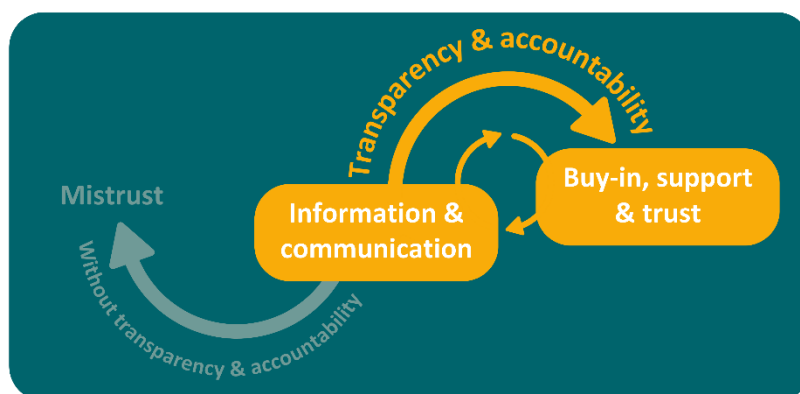


Figure 6: Features that build or erode trust (Source: Authors' own)

A foundation for building trust is ensuring that a process is based on credible and up-to-date information and knowledge. Alone, this is inadequate. Information needs to be accompanied by regular and effective communication to ensure it reaches the necessary audiences, and should be communicated in ways that are relevant. Transparency and accountability are essential ingredients in building the legitimacy of a process. Buy-in and support are most likely to be built when information, communication, transparency and accountability have been invested in, which all contribute to building credibility, relevance and legitimacy – all important features identified by the literature (Cash et al., 2003; Cash et al., 2020; Boule, 2023b). Conversely, if information is not credible, relevance is

ineffectively demonstrated, and processes are opaque and lack accountability, the result is the erosion of trust. Thus, trust supports and enables change, whilst a dearth of trust constrains change. These processes are complex, iterative and highly contingent, and these different concepts interact to co-create one another and enable or constrain change.

4.5.1 The role of information, communication and engagement

Information, communication and engagement were highlighted by interviewees as playing an essential role in building trust and creating buy-in. Participants voiced concerns that a lack of trust around the just transition is partly due to the poor understanding about what a just transition would entail for specific actor groups, its positive and negative impacts, and the risks of climate change for current and future generations and the economy. These insights revealed one of the roles of credible and granular information, and that the government and PCC need to use this to better define, communicate and help people understand the just transition – including its purpose, impacts and opportunities. If a critical mass of support and buy-in is to be established, stakeholder groups will need to be convinced by evidence that makes a case for how a just transition will improve their prospects. Table 4 gives an overview of some of the reports related to a just transition developed or commissioned by the PCC.

Table 4: Reports developed or commissioned by the PCC to help build the knowledge base for a just transition in South Africa

Report title	Authors	Year of publication
The South Africa Climate Finance Landscape 2023	Climate Policy Initiative GreenCape	2023
Stakeholder Report: Energy Dialogue Series	PCC	2023
Technical Report Supporting the Recommendation for South Africa's Electricity System	PCC	2023
Concept note proposed for a Just Transition Finance Mechanism	PCC	2023
Stakeholder Perspectives on South Africa's Just Energy Investment Plan	OneWorld Sustainable Investments	2023
Stakeholder Perspectives on the PCC's Recommendations on Electricity Planning in South Africa.	OneWorld Sustainable Investments	2023
Guidance for Putting Climate Resilient Development Pathways into Practice Report 1 of 4	African Climate & Development Initiative (ACDI) Climate Systems Analysis Group (CSAG)	2022
Guidance for Putting Climate Resilient Development Pathways into Practice Report 2 of 4	African Climate & Development Initiative (ACDI) Climate Systems Analysis Group (CSAG)	2022
Guidance for Putting Climate Resilient Development Pathways into Practice Report 3 of 4	African Climate & Development Initiative (ACDI) Climate Systems Analysis Group (CSAG)	2022
Guidance for Putting Climate Resilient Development Pathways into Practice Report 4 of 4	African Climate & Development Initiative (ACDI) Climate Systems Analysis Group (CSAG)	2022
A Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa	PCC	2022

Several interviewees highlighted that along with information goes misinformation, which damages credibility and is hindering progress of and support for a just transition in South Africa. Addressing misinformation was identified as a role the PCC should continue to play. The PCC does so in part with the technical work it leads or commissions (see Table 4 above). An interviewee from academia shared:

“What the PCC teams are doing - I saw them yesterday in my class - in separating what is in the media with data, with facts, with reality, with documents, with reports ... that's amazing work. I don't know how this is happening in other environments, but yesterday what I saw in class, I saw a few eyes of students, you know, opening wider. Because they [the students] have their own opinions ... and then they have the academic, theoretical, scientific background ... and now comes the PCC team saying ... 'don't confuse what is in the media with the facts. Read deeper.' ... The next generation [of students], with this kind of engagement, will learn at least to challenge media clickbait. And the PCC is doing quite a lot of work on that - I've seen that with my students.

The above example illustrates that the PCC can counter the issue of misinformation, as a credible and independent body. The PCC typically puts forward evidence-based recommendation reports such as for Komati Power Station's decommissioning (PCC, 2023c), which communicated how and why the Komati power station is being decommissioned in a careful and phased manner to address the immediate and concrete impacts on the livelihoods of workers and their communities. Komati's decommissioning is heavily contested, as is observable in the public fora that have been set up to find a way forward (see [Box 4.3](#)), which demonstrates just how difficult this work is.

Box 4.3: Insights on Komati

“

I was there at the last engagement that happened at ... Komati Power Station, where the PCC was engaging the social partners in that area ... [I observed] the anger that is there. ... With respect to the consultation, the feedback was: The community felt they were not properly consulted. And based on ... the initial engagement towards the decommissioning phase, they were of the view that they should have been consulted with the details and what to expect from this just transition.

What the country is going through, in terms of the high unemployment level, that's the other element that, in my view, triggered the anger.

Interviewees felt that the PCC could strengthen its work to combat misinformation by communicating its work and the supporting evidence more widely, particularly to non-technical audiences. Part of this includes communicating the direct relevance of the evidence base and its findings according to specific stakeholder groups. To improve and coordinate the flow of information, an interviewee from academia suggested that a “communication plan” be developed for the just transition and should extend beyond the PCC and involve government and social partners. Such a plan could assist in meeting a common call from participants: that there needs to be more transparent, frequent and timely communication of information on the just transition - all crucial for cultivating buy-in and trust. Who is responsible for a message, and how it is relayed, also have implications for its impact. Civil society interviewees and focus groups highlighted that information is often most impactful when coming from people with whom the recipients can relate.

4.5.2 The role of transparency and accountability

Almost all interviewees highlighted the importance of transparency and accountability for building trust. Part of this is clearly communicating roles and responsibilities, in particular with regard to leadership and funding entities in the just transition. Existing issues of transparency and accountability, or lack thereof, that characterise South Africa today (Bhorat et al., 2017) have to be acknowledged as part of the context in which South Africa's just transition, including the PCC's work, takes place, as highlighted by an interviewee from academia:

“You can't have [the] discussion of, ‘How do we use this money and push South Africa forward and do this just transition?’ if we haven't had the discussion of, ‘How do we make sure that money doesn't disappear? How do we make sure that money is accountable? How do we make sure the people in charge of that money are accountable?’

This raised the issue of the low levels of trust currently present in South Africa, particularly between citizens and their government – a sentiment echoed by several interviewees as well as focus group participants, which is influencing the pace and direction of the just transition. An even more sobering assessment expressed by one focus group participant was that trust and social consensus cannot be built in South Africa's current context of high levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and crime, not least of all because of how poor governance and corruption have played a significant part in creating these injustices, as has the persistent legacy of apartheid. The mixed and often contradictory statements about the just transition coming from different cabinet ministers in the South African government has exacerbated the concerns around poor governance. Repairing legitimacy of the state and addressing these extreme development challenges will require rebuilding state institutions, addressing corruption, improving the performance of the state, and strengthening civic involvement. All of these elements may require decades of work. At the same time, all the work going into the just transition will need to convincingly show how it is helping to address these issues.

A suspicion of foreign entities and funding supporting South Africa's just transition is seemingly driven by a concern that South Africa is beholden to the interests of the Global North. An example of this is the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), an agreement announced at COP 26 through which the EU, France, Germany, UK and US (known as the International Partners Group (IPG)) committed to providing USD 8.5 billion to support the implementation of South Africa's NDC and just transition (International Partners Group, 2021). The announcement of the JETP led to a domestic process to develop South Africa's JET IP (Presidency, 2022). Interviewees highlighted that those suspicious of the JETP and JET IP are concerned by opaque processes, the lack of transparency and accountability about the status of the funding, the progress with disbursement, and the vested interests of IPG members, all concerns raised by the literature too (Boulle, 2023a). Open and participatory processes that embody transparency and accountability are vital for addressing mistrust and for building support.

4.5.3 Creating buy-in and support

For a just transition to unfold at the scale and speed required, building a critical mass of buy-in and support is imperative. Interviewees across sectors and social partners highlighted that given the high levels of unemployment and inequality in South Africa, people are naturally going to oppose the transition if it is not premised on quid pro quo “jobs for jobs”. Essentially, a just transition must be able to speak convincingly to people's immediate livelihood needs and development needs such as access to employment, energy and energy security. The PCC was criticised by interviewees for its lack of focus on employment, economic growth, GDP, and development, a criticism which seems to be misplaced

given the focus of technical reports and sessions of the PCC on these topics. One of the more implicit critiques was the need to overcome the challenge of the losses of the transition being immediate and concrete, whereas many of the gains are more abstract and reserved for the future. This is especially true for workers and communities who will lose their livelihoods when, for example, coal power stations are decommissioned. Many of these workers and communities are already vulnerable and fear falling below the poverty line. The transition out of fossil fuels will need to be done in a phased manner, so too will the transition into renewables and other emerging industries. The challenge is to convincingly and concretely demonstrate how these processes will offset one another for the better, and how this will directly benefit the most vulnerable. The focus groups highlighted that these messages are not reaching communities on the ground, or that they are perceived to be inaccurate given the job losses that are already visible in their communities.

Another argument made by interviewees was that the just transition needs to be supported by broad-front politics. This means that we cannot wait until perfect agreement is achieved before progressing, but there needs to be enough agreement on certain topics to allow the country to move forward and adapt as new information becomes available. Part of this is about building broad-based coalitions in support of the just transition that cut across diverse stakeholder groups. However, this is difficult work due to the dearth of trust, as one interviewee remarked:

“*And there's a lot of lack of trust between these different constituencies. I mean, even between civil society and labour...Because to me it's obvious that if you want to have a bottom-up just transition, you need to build a mass movement. And that means you have to unite all the different civil society formations and labour together...*”

The reach and breadth of engagement was another theme that emerged for strengthening buy-in by convincing social partners that enough of a diversity of perspectives have been recognised by the process, to represent their own views, a sentiment strongly voiced by civil society interviewees and focus group participants.

A range of viewpoints were expressed by focus group participants regarding how trust can be built between communities and the PCC. The discussions also highlighted how this trust-building project goes well beyond the work of the PCC, and requires all of society. Participants in Ermelo expressed that effective, clear, and transparent communication are essential prerequisites. They noted that trust is built through accountability and the actual implementation of plans and commitments, as well as communicating and taking responsibility for failures. An urgent need for greater transparency regarding funding and financial flows was highlighted. A strong lack of trust in government and councillors was expressed, rooted in not delivering on commitments, lack of support for communities, and corruption concerns, issues that need to be addressed in the attempt to build social consensus. Participants in Motherwell were of the view that trust and social consensus should be built from the ground up, with community leaders and support from the municipality.

4.6 Building consensus and addressing contestation in a just transition

4.6.1 Sources of consensus and contestation

Achieving the vision articulated by South Africa's Just Transition Framework will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-economy transformation. This is by its very nature disruptive, around which contestation naturally emerges. Building consensus is a prerequisite for implementing a just transition,

and needs to be done amidst the conditions of complexity and uncertainty that accompany all major transitions. Consensus and contestation are inter-related, constantly interacting and shifting one another. It follows that instead of thinking about one cancelling out the other, it may be more constructive to think of finding a balance between the two that enables action. Figure 7 below visualises some of the sources of consensus and contestation as identified by interviewees, suggesting some of the features to concentrate on in the effort to shift the location of consensus.

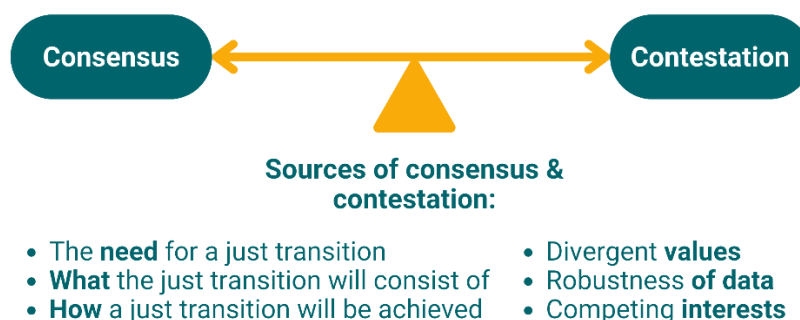


Figure 7: Balancing consensus and contestation (Source: Authors' own)

Interviewees spoke extensively about consensus and contestation, and identified three ways they relate to the just transition:

- the **need** for a just transition;
- **what** the just transition will consist of; and
- **how** a just transition will be achieved.

There was broad agreement amongst interviewees of the need for a just transition in South Africa, and there was some consensus about what this might consist of. The national-level consensus is represented by South Africa's Just Transition Framework (PCC, 2022b), which is the culmination of an extensive, multi-year stakeholder process started by the National Planning Commission back in 2018, and concluded by the PCC in 2021, suggesting as the literature does, the importance of process for creating buy-in and consensus (Boulle, 2023b).

While there is some agreement around the *need* for a just transition and *what* it might consist of, *how* the just transition will be implemented, is where, according to interviewees, most contestation is located. An interviewee representing academia argued that for the implementation of a just transition, conflict may arise around three features: **values**, **data**, and **interests**. Values were described as often the most difficult to address, while data can be addressed with evidence and transparency. Addressing interests requires finding a path that reaches a compromise. From the literature and observation of the process, so far, the just transition process in South Africa has tried to address all three to varying degrees. Interviewees noted the struggles with aligning values given that they are deeply held by actors. The PCC process, has commissioned technical work (see Table 4) to generate evidence to address concerns about different parts of the transition, and to build consensus around areas that are well supported by the evidence base. Here it is worth noting that different areas of the knowledge base are at different levels of development which has implications for consensus and contestation (Boulle, 2023b). More specifically, advancements in data, modelling and other research (within and outside the PCC process) have developed a compelling evidence base for transitioning to a renewables-based power sector, around which there is now broad consensus. Conversely the granular, and location-specific socioeconomic impacts of transitioning out of coal into renewables is not as well understood, and still an area of contestation. An interviewee from academia spoke of the need to:

“Clarify the concrete opportunity space for the transition, not just for shutting things down, but for what comes next. There's this kind of vagary around the potential ... South Africa's got this potential, Mpumalanga has got this potential. There's agricultural land, there's beautiful land that can be used to support tourism, there's enough water. There are roads. There's this infrastructural legacy that the mines have left behind. And yet, you can't turn potential into businesses. There's a lot of work that goes between 'potential' and 'concrete businesses', and then [those] businesses adding up to a diversified economy. And there's no money for the research that clarifies that space. We have to think about why that is.

Another theme that emerged implicitly from the interviews, was that it is easier to build consensus around abstract and long-term issues, than it is on concrete and short term issues, as this is where the materiality of actors' interests becomes visible. The challenge then is how to align these different layers and dimensions to develop a coherent, ambitious, phased, long-term transition, around which enough consensus can be built at every step of the way to unlock action. Clearly consensus and contestation look different depending on where you are sitting. Bringing along actors to build consensus, requires speaking to these different viewpoints.

A PCC Secretariat interviewee highlighted the fundamental necessity of social compacting for a just transition, while other interviewees shared rich insights about how to build a critical mass of consensus around a just transition and stressed that “*consensus is not stagnant*” and cannot be built through a once-off or short-term process. Interviewees acknowledged that consensus does not refer to unanimous agreement but rather enough agreement in a decision-making process to proceed. But “*the problem with social compact is its often lowest common denominator - what can everyone agree to? But nevertheless, the social compact framing is a good pathway forward ... at least, you know, the process itself might unlock certain things*” mentioned one interviewee representing civil society. If consensus is typically found around the lowest common denominator, a real challenge is how to shift the location of consensus to greater ambition and transformation. In terms of “*unlocking certain things*”, this needs to be a feature of any process – that it can deliver unexpected outcomes which may be critical in finding solutions to sticking points hindering tangible progress.

Interviewees representing academia and civil society pointed out that mediating conflict and oppositional views is a key part of building robust consensus, as one remarked: “*I wish we would start to, you know, really allow people to allow there to be conflict... you can allow conflict through differences of opinion... get those out in the open*”. This requires, in the opinion of some academia interviewees, a fundamental questioning of the aim and approach of achieving consensus and shared their frustration with approaching consensus-building as an exercise in convincing other people: “*There's an assumption that we already know the answer and we just need to convince them that they must accept it*”. The truth is that significant uncertainties exist, there is much that we do not know, such is the case when navigating complexity. These uncertainties and unknowns can only be uncovered and addressed by testing ideas to see what works and what does not, and then using this learning to adapt.

4.6.2 Valuing diverse knowledge systems and shifting the point of consensus

To shift consensus in the direction of greater ambition, inclusion and implementation requires advancements in the knowledge base as well as processes to generate and use knowledge. The participation of social partners depends on their knowledge, capacities and interests, as well as process design and improving access and infrastructure for participation. As one interviewee from academia reflected:

“When we think about this process of consultation, it cannot be consultation for the achievement of one particular consensus. It has to be broadly the capacity and the capability for ongoing relationships between engagement, knowledge generation and decision making.

This means that consensus can only be developed out of processes that meaningfully engage with social partners, that use and generate the best available knowledge, and that give social partners a stake in actual decision making. This rests on the knowledge and capabilities of social partners to traverse these spaces, and represent their interests in the terms recognised by the process. As one interviewee explained:

“You need to build the infrastructure for ongoing democratic participation ... making sure that people ... whatever level of formal training and formal education they have, are as well capacitated [and] as capable as possible of clearly articulating their needs, weighing up those needs against what can be done, and charting a path forward.

These statements illustrate the need for sustained capacity building on a long-term basis to allow a broader, more diverse set of social partners to participate and influence these processes. As one interviewee remarked:

“We need to stop having such contempt for people who don't have access to either financial resources or to the formal skills development and training that grants them access into sense-making and decision-making spaces.

These reflections also draw attention to how formal policy processes typically have narrow conceptions of capacity, and which capacities count. If just transitions are to be transformative and inclusive, they will need to radically relook at the meanings of capacity, and honour a broader set of capacities and ways of knowing. Transdisciplinary approaches to capacity building offer useful guidance in this regard by focusing on a plurality of knowledge forms, a diverse range of actors, and holistic, participatory and long-term approaches (Nautiyal & Klinksy, 2022). Interviewees' reflections resonated with the transdisciplinary literature:

“I think there's certainly not enough of a diversity of knowledge production, and I think, also, that it's very clear that certain things are prioritised as issues that are deserving of significant resources and support ... If you're going to support democratic decision making, you have to make sure that all actors are equally supported in the knowledge production processes that are relevant to them.

These sentiments indicate how instrumental knowledge can be in influencing decision making and highlighting hierarchies in types of knowledge, disciplines and knowledge areas, which continue to persist; a theme highlighted by the literature (Jasanoff & Wynne, 1998). All knowledge is not held equal. While the knowledge production of experts is typically granted most authority in policy processes, some interviewees were sceptical of experts overstepping their areas of expertise saying: “all this sort of ideating around the concept of justice, and it's all done by engineers and economists.” So, whilst the call is for greater equality in terms of the disciplines and types of knowledge that are valued by the just transition process, experts need to practice intellectual humility to guard against taking up too much space, while others such as indigenous knowledge systems are overlooked. Knowledge brokers have a key role to play in ensuring a diversity of knowledge systems are recognised (a finding reiterated by [Box 4.1](#)).

Focus groups were important for raising the views of communities, highlighting that social consensus should be built from the ground up, from communities, and that processes should be led by community members, with support from municipalities. Characteristics of these bottom-up approaches included:

educational programmes, integrated multi-stakeholder structures, extensive consultations in different locations, proactive leadership from councillors to guide these consultations, and transparent decision-making.

Building a critical mass of support for a just transition, out of which consensus can emerge, is also about building new interest groups around emerging, just transition aligned sectors, to establish coalitions of support that can organise, resource and generate momentum for change. Here, in the view of interviewees, the PCC has played a crucial role in building a compelling storyline around a just transition so that it represents a compelling alternative to South Africa's current and historical approach to development. Much work lies ahead for the PCC, South African government, and all social partners to build on the progress achieved, and deliver the depth and scale of change required.

5 Recommendations for stakeholder engagement

This final section presents recommendations to inform the PCC's future engagement processes on the just transition (see Figure 8). The recommendations are organised according to the four main themes that emerged from the research:



Interpretations of a just transition



Engagement processes



Trust and distrust



Consensus and contestation

The PCC has a pivotal role to play in bringing together these different parts of the puzzle to steer a coordinated and coherent way forward. But equally important is to recognise the constraints the PCC is operating under, and that the South African government (which can mobilise the whole machinery of the state) and other social partners have crucial roles to play too, and in many cases larger human and financial resources to draw on. While the focus of these recommendations is aimed at the PCC, they also point to the roles of others.



Figure 8: Recommendations for stakeholder engagement (Source: Authors' own)

5.1 Commit to a set of core guiding principles

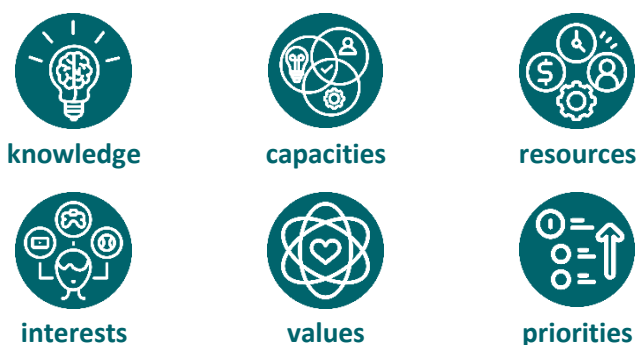
Principles can be instrumental in informing ways of working that are appropriate for the characteristics of the challenges for which solutions are sought. Given the characteristics of a just transition and the multiple interpretations thereof, the following principles were identified:

- Acknowledge the **complexity and uncertainties** that characterise just transitions. Focus on what can be done with what we know.
- Practice **agility and adaptability** to new information, opportunities and ways of knowing as they become available.
- **Humility** is central to recognising, drawing in, and working with **diverse experiences, knowledges and wisdoms**.
- There are different **entry points** for involving different actor groups, so tailor strategies accordingly.
- **Demonstration is powerful**. Focus on concrete action now, and how this can increasingly align with ambitious long term visions and goals.
- **Connect** social partners' stories, risks and opportunities to the **bigger, evolving picture**.
- **Systems change and behaviour change** is difficult to drive, but is at the heart of achieving a just transition.
- **Technology and natural sciences alone are inadequate**. **Social sciences** have a key role to play in developing approaches to bring about the necessary change.

5.2 Practice robust engagement

Levels of engagement and participation are determined by a variety of factors, which provide concrete and specific guidelines that the PCC, the South African government, and social partners can use to adapt and strengthen their approach to engagements. These include:

- **Accessibility of a process**, which is determined by:
 - process **design**,
 - the **frequency and temporal** nature of engagements (short versus long term), and
 - the **format and location** of engagements.
- **Participation of actors**, which is based on their:



Some **ingredients** for future engagements:

- Focus on **creating spaces that are hospitable and inviting** to those that are not the 'usual suspects' to address marginalisation of the '**unusual suspects**' and build their capacities for participation. This will require innovative approaches for **extending the reach** of engagements.

An engagement format and setting typically benefits certain groups while marginalising others. Particularly in national conversations that are technical in nature, certain groups that do not hold these capacities feel intimidated or ill-equipped to participate. The effect is that marginalised voices are silenced and their knowledge and insights lost. **Developing specific strategies to address power imbalances** is essential in establishing differentiated and truly inclusive processes that not **only allow the participation of diverse knowledge and insights but demonstrably value them**. Other elements include informing communities in advance of an engagement, and **holding capacity building and knowledge sharing** sessions so that social partners are equipped to participate in the engagements.

- Develop a **live database of social partners** that is constantly updated, that can be used for outreach for engagements to ensure coverage becomes increasingly more comprehensive and granular, and to aid systematic and tailored ways of engaging with different social partners.
- Be **transparent about the objectives and expected outcomes** of each engagement. Communicate these in advance with social partners.
- Develop, communicate and implement guidelines for **how feedback is engaged with**, and a clear **rationale for inclusion or exclusion of feedback**.
- **Pay attention** to what *is* and *is not* working in the context more generally and identify innovative and inclusive ways to **work with what exists** and is working, and to **rebuild** what once worked but has been eroded. This requires attention to **context specificities**.
- Hold the space to allow **flexibility for unexpected outcomes**. This requires active listening and willingness to change plans according to stakeholder inputs as well as considering appropriate timings of engagements for processes and decision making.

A learning from the JET IP for the PCC is that both the timing and quality of engagement processes are critical, and that engagement processes should be run before a document is finalised, so that social partners are actively involved in its drafting.

- Engagements with communities can be seen as **extractive** in nature, mining the knowledge and insights of community members. **Long-term and continuous involvement is essential** in walking a journey with communities and allowing them to benefit from the fruits of their labour.
- **Transdisciplinary approaches and tools** offer guidance for valuing a plurality of knowledge forms, a diversity of actors, and holistic, participatory and long-term approaches.
- Run a transparent process to elect **champions that represent subsectors and social partners, that can be engaged by the PCC and its commissioners** regularly, and that have the responsibility to communicate the views of their constituencies to the PCC and of the PCC to

their constituencies. The intention would be to provide an additional layer of support to the PCC and its commissioners, not to be in competition with them.

- **Robust engagement cannot come at the cost of urgent action.** There is no amount of engagement that will guarantee perfect consensus. Whilst adhering to robust engagement, **leadership must be given the licence to act and then be held to account**, to ensure action is not delayed, and is enhanced over time through **learning by doing**.

5.3 Take steps to build trust and address mistrust

- The PCC plays a key role as a **boundary organisation, knowledge broker, and translator of relevance**. Continued work is needed to communicate research findings in ways that demonstrate their relevance and implications for different users of the knowledge (e.g. policymakers for developing policy, communities for building awareness and developing solutions). This does not only apply to academic knowledge and its users, but also other forms of knowledge coming from other knowledge holders such as communities, governmental officials, and the private sector, the translation of which should also inform academia, policymakers and others. There are **multiple forms and uses of knowledge that flow in all directions**. The PCC, South African government, and all social partners need to participate in interpreting, translating and facilitating these flows of knowledge that bring about change, working with skilled knowledge brokers.
- Communication from the PCC must clearly demonstrate that its work **represents the interests of a diversity of social partners**, by framing this work in the terms that are relevant to different social partners. This will require **working with other knowledge brokers that share similar backgrounds and life experiences as their constituencies**. This also addresses the finding that **“who” communicates a message is as important for gaining traction as “what” the message is**.
- A **monitoring and evaluation tool** (ideally, **publicly accessible and live**) to **assess progress and report on just transition delivery** would exhibit concrete processes and systems for **transparency and accountability**. The PCC is currently developing **monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework** to track the progress in implementing the just transition, to identify successes and gaps, and to inform future action. In the coming year the **PCC will pilot the framework and consult** with relevant government departments and social partners to inform the evolution of the framework. This is a noteworthy development, the progress of which should be closely followed.
- The greatest areas of **misunderstanding, mistrust and fear around the just transition** appear to relate quite significantly to **knowledge gaps**. It will require a concerted effort of government, the PCC, and social partners working together to identify these **“hotspot areas”**, and then interrogate what knowledge needs to be produced, by whom and how, to address these gaps. Following this, who this knowledge needs to be communicated to, and how, also needs to be identified.
- The **promulgation of the Climate Change Bill** presents a window of opportunity for the PCC to resolve any misinterpretations about its role, mandate and relationship with the South African government. The PCC would benefit from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the

Environment (the architects of the Bill) convening a transparent, public conversation about the PCC's role, composition and relationship with the state. Building and sustaining legitimacy and support in a low-trust environment requires continual work to address valid concerns as well as misconceptions.

5.4 Build consensus and take contestation seriously

Building consensus and addressing contestation is difficult work, for which **knowledge and process** can contribute to shifting the needle.

- To support consensus building, the PCC, working with government and social partners, can identify **areas around which there is greatest consensus**, to push for progress in these areas, and to learn how to approach more contested areas. For this, identifying points around which coalitions of support could be organised is crucial. Building **diverse coalitions** is imperative for establishing **broad-based support and consensus** and building **social compacts**.

The PCC played an instrumental brokering role for South Africa's NDC Update, which through effective process design, knowledge, and creating momentum, shifted the position of actors and **the location of consensus in the direction of greater ambition**. This shifting locus of consensus can help to support more ambitious action over time, which is vital to unlock pathways and trajectories compatible with the ambitious long-term visions that have been articulated in South Africa's various just transition documents and fora.

- Ignoring or **covering up contestation** often leads to that contestation emerging further down the line and derailing processes. If contestation is openly discussed in transparent conversations, some of the seemingly irreconcilable differences can be adequately accounted for and resolved in part, if not completely. For those that cannot be resolved, there is a more granular understanding of the work that lies ahead to address these thorny issues. To bring about the **scale and depth of change required**, a just transition cannot simply proceed on those areas for which there is overwhelming consensus; **contested issues will need to be tackled too**.
- A major source of contestation is that the **losses of a just transition tend to be immediate and concrete, while the gains tend to be more abstract, reserved for a time in the future**. The PCC (along with government and social partners) has a key role to play in managing this tension and **convincingly demonstrating** how these trade-offs will be managed in a phased manner that benefits those likely to encounter losses in the immediate future.
- **Knowledge and process** (and their key ingredients) can be used to shift the location of consensus (and create unexpected outcomes) from the **lowest common denominator** to a place of **greater ambition, transformation and implementation, that accelerates** the progress of a just transition in South Africa.

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7 Appendix: Data collection

Table A1: Interview and focus group questions

Question recipients	Questions
PCC Secretariat	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please take us through the PCCs overall approach for stakeholder engagements and public consultations on the just transition to date? 2. What are the key sectors that have been engaged in the just transition to date by the PCC? Are there any gaps that need to be addressed? 3. What sectors does the PCC perceive as being the most influential to the success of the just transition? How would you describe the engagement and support, and any resistance from the key sectors for the just transition to date? 4. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the just transition engagement process adopted by the PCC? (If frequency of engagements is mentioned as a weakness: What are some of the constraints for in-depth/increased engagements?) 5. Has the PCC received any feedback on engagements for the just transition? If so, how has/will this be addressed and communicated with social partners and communities? 6. How can trust and social consensus be built in strategic sectors and communities for supporting the just transition?
Interviewees	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you been engaged by the PCC, or any other entities or projects on the just transition before? If so, what are your views on this engagement? If not, how would you like to be engaged on just transition topics? 2. How has your sector been influenced by the just transition? 3. What role does your sector play in influencing the just transition? What is your vision for your sector for the just transition? 4. How would you describe the views and positionality of key social partners within your sector regarding the just transition? 5. How can trust and social consensus be built in strategic sectors and communities for supporting the just transition?
Focus group participants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do community members coordinate participation in stakeholder engagement? If not, how can this be changed? 2. How do community members communicate and coordinate for engaging on issues such as development? 3. What climate change related issues are you and the community exposed to? 4. Are there key structures of communication and coordination in the community for engaging on developmental, climate change and other issues? 5. What is your understanding of the country's just transition? How do you think your community will be affected? 6. How do you understand your own role and potential impact in the just transition? 7. Have you been engaged by the PCC or any other entities or projects on the just transition before? If so, what are your views on this engagement? If not, how would you like to be engaged on just transition topics? 8. How can trust be enhanced and social consensus be built around the just transition and who are the key social partners that need to be involved?