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REALIST REVIEW ON JUST TRANSITION

Key findings:

Common enablers for just transition interventions across all or most sectors included in this review are *robust funding mechanisms, strong alignment with needs and priorities, political will and ownership, alongside social dialogue and stakeholder engagement.*

Hard enablers such as *funding, investments in infrastructure and technology as well as strategic clustering of projects* were more evident in the **energy sector**, together with **soft enablers** such as *political will, trust building and collaborations and partnerships.*

In the **agriculture and ecosystem sectors**, we found that **soft enablers** such as *alignment, coordination and contextual awareness* emerged as important features of just transition interventions, alongside *funding and technical know-how.*

Common barriers to successful just transition across all sectors included *bureaucratic and legal barriers, exclusion and unequal distribution of benefits, as well as inadequate technical skills.*

1. Objectives

This realist review on just transition, completed by the Green Climate Fund Independent Evaluation Unit (GCF-IEU) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), provides a rigorous and precise summary of global evidence on interventions aiming at outcomes consistent with a just transition in developing countries, specifically in the energy, agriculture, and infrastructure sectors, and in ecosystem services.

2. What are realist reviews? Why are they useful?

A realist synthesis explores the contexts, mechanisms, enablers and barriers to successful implementation.

The examination of theories of change in this review has illuminated the mechanisms and conditions for just transition through overarching and sectoral enablers and barriers. As just transitions in developing countries are at a formative stage, this evidence helps to predict the likelihood of early indicative outcomes and impacts.

3. The rationale for this review

Just transition supports the transformation towards greener, more inclusive, more resilient societies. It is a strategic approach to the pursuit of climate goals and sustainable development by minimising social risks and maximising social and decent work opportunities from mitigation and adaptation. It pays full attention to the fairness of processes and to the distribution of costs



and benefits. It is based on social dialogue as well as stakeholder engagement and respect for human rights at work. It is context specific, and aligned with national circumstances and priorities. There is significant potential for international co-learning to improve purposeful design and quality of policies, financial support, and collaboration between stakeholders.

4. Methods

To identify relevant studies, we conducted searches of academic and peer reviewed literature via databases and grey literature through selected institutional websites.

Only interventions that met the following criteria were included:

1. The intervention took place in a developing country.
2. The intervention intended to contribute towards outcomes consistent with a just transition in one or more of the following sectors/systems: energy, agriculture and food systems, infrastructure, and ecosystem services.
3. The intervention had an underlying theory of change (explicit or implicit) and was sufficiently advanced to demonstrate evidence of effects at output and/or outcome level.

Given the emergent nature of just transition, most studies deployed a qualitative case study led approach. All studies were screened to ensure robust and replicable research methods. Due to limitations in budget and resources, only literature written and published in English was included. The team used a three-stage quality appraisal form to guide full text screening.

5. Results

From a total of 8,726 just transition studies found across four databases and 30 websites, 76 studies made it through all stages of screening to the final data extraction stage. The team completed data extraction forms for 99 interventions within these 76 studies. A high concentration of interventions were in middle-

income countries, such as Indonesia, India, South Africa and China. In contrast, the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) were hardly represented. The evidence base on the infrastructure sector is extremely thin.

We found **common enablers for just transition interventions across all or most sectors.**

These include the need for *robust funding mechanisms, strong alignment with needs and priorities, political will and ownership, alongside social dialogue and stakeholder engagement.* This suggests some critical factors are required to support and enable successful just transition in developing countries.

These findings break down slightly differently by sector. **Hard enablers** such as *funding, investments in infrastructure and technology as well as strategic clustering of projects* were more evident in the **energy sector**, together with **soft enablers** such as *political will, trust building as well as collaborations and partnerships.*

In the **agriculture and ecosystems sectors**, we found that **soft enablers** such as *alignment, coordination and contextual awareness* emerged as important features of just transition interventions, alongside *funding and technical know-how.*

We also found several **common barriers to successful just transition across all sectors**, including *bureaucratic and legal barriers, exclusion and unequal distribution of benefits, and inadequate technical skills.*

6. Contribution

The study found evidence that **both climate outcomes and social equity and social gains are being considered** through interventions consistent with just transition outcomes across all sectors. They demonstrate emerging approaches to just transition in developing countries recognise that a transition can only be 'just' if it includes both climate and social elements.

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