

The Climate and Energy thematic area

The work of FES South Africa with project partners under the climate and energy thematic area will be daunting in 2020, as this is a big year for the multilateral system on climate change, as well as a period of massive upheaval for our national electricity system. It is the year in which our President has committed to “enhance” our pledge on climate action under the Paris Agreement – known as our Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) – specifically for the period to 2030. It is also the year in which decisions have to be made on how to rescue Eskom, our state-owned monopoly power utility, from a deepening debt spiral exacerbated by on-going decline of plant performance.

On these themes our partners are civil society organisations promoting energy democracy and a just transition to a low-carbon economy and climate-resilient society, through popular education and mobilization, as well as directly engaging government through formal policy processes, input to Parliament and ad hoc lobbying. Working with two new partners includes supporting revitalization of the South African Climate Action Network (SACAN), as well as the development of a Climate Justice Coalition, being led by 350Africa.org working with the SA Federation of Trades Unions (SAFTU), formed after a split away from COSATU – the labour federation that remains in an alliance with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the SA communist Party.

Government work to elaborate and implement the National Climate Change Response Policy adopted in 2011 has come to a virtual standstill over recent years, with many processes stalled for lack of a clear mandate or guidance from the Executive, while the ‘lead agent’ is the relatively junior Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF). The policy was supposed to be reviewed after 5 years, as it is based on the science of well over a decade ago. Instead we have a mitigation pledge that has been internationally judged as highly unsatisfactory, as it cannot be reconciled with the global goal of keeping planetary heating well below 2°C, much less with attempts to limit average warming to 1.5 °C.

SACAN will be advocating more progressive and effective policies and highlighting shortcomings, both nationally and internationally, in alliance with over 1 300 CAN international member organisations. These efforts will be complimented by a project that looks beyond mainstream responses to challenge the capitalist growth paradigm and systems of ownership over natural resources, promoting system change as well as strong individual behavior change through a participatory project to develop a [Climate Justice Charter](#). As the SA Constitution provides for the formal adoption of charters, it will be presented to Parliament by or in October. We continue to work with Project 90 by 2030, focusing on a Just Energy Transition (JET) – as a core component of a more inclusive just transition to a climate-resilient society - developing common understanding and policy positions amongst different stakeholders, including unions

and community-based organisations. Their most recent publication is a popular but detailed introduction to the concept: [Remaking our energy future](#), which is complimented by the earlier [The role of ownership](#) in a Just Energy Transition.

To develop the knowledge base and raise the profile of communities living in the coal-fields and thus vulnerable to climate change response measures, the Society, Work and Policies (SWOP) institute at Wits University will be continuing participatory action research in an area of Mpumalanga where aging mines and partial closure of a coal-fired power plant has already led to loss of jobs and associated incomes. The area has been proposed for a pilot project, under the National Planning Commission's process with stakeholders to establish a 'Vision 2050' a Just Transition, which is expected to culminate in a national Summit in May.

Considerable effort will go into raising political will amongst all social partners to increase the ambition of both renewable energy development and emissions reduction, commensurate with improved understanding of our potential and the recent shifts in energy technology costs. Advocacy for a just transition also involves emphasizing the gender dimensions of energy poverty and vulnerability to climate change impacts, as well as local air pollution.

We will also continue to support the Alternative Information and Development Centre's research initiative working with unions and international partners in seeking solutions to the financial crisis besetting our national electricity system, which do not assume or facilitate liberalization. In the world's most unequal society and economy there is an imperative to treat access to electricity as a basic right. South Africa's abundant and widespread renewable energy resources provide the ideal basis for such an approach, with increased provision of free basic services.

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