



# The Politics of the Energy Transition in the Global South Webinar Series

## Webinar #1: The Political Economy of Country Platforms

Energy transition country platforms—such as Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs)—are increasingly central to global efforts to mobilise finance and coordination for climate action in developing and emerging economies. Despite strong technical rationales and growing international commitments, progress has been uneven, with **political economy dynamics, rather than technology, finance, or policy design alone, often being the decisive factors in shaping outcomes.**

On Thursday 15 January 2026, ODI Global, in partnership with The Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice (TWP-CoP) and The Policy Practice, hosted a webinar to discuss the political economy of country platforms with leading researchers, practitioners, and policy professionals. The webinar was conducted under the Chatham House Rule to allow for open and frank discussion of the political economy challenges.<sup>1</sup> It also used an innovative ‘fishbowl’ format which allowed participants to freely enter and exit the conversation. This note provides a short summary of the key points of discussion from the webinar.

## Why Political Economy Matters

Energy transitions are not technocratic undertakings; they are profoundly political transformations that reallocate economic rents, reshape labour markets, alter regional development paths, and shift power between state and non-state actors. Moving away from fossil fuels affects who controls infrastructure, who benefits from subsidies and regulation, and whose livelihoods are put at risk. As a result, transitions inevitably generate winners, losers, resistance, and contestation.

From this perspective, slow global progress on climate action is best understood not simply as a failure of international coordination and collective action, but as the cumulative outcome of domestic distributive conflicts. Governments may commit to ambitious climate targets while simultaneously facing:

- Entrenched fossil fuel interests with strong political influence,
- Dependence on carbon-intensive industries for jobs, revenue, and political support,
- Fragmented or weak state capacity to implement complex reforms,

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<sup>1</sup>When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.



- Electoral incentives that privilege short-term affordability and stability over long-term transformation.

Political economy analysis (PEA) provides a framework for navigating these realities. It shifts focus from idealised “best practice” solutions to what is feasible, credible, and sustainable in specific political contexts, and how feasibility can be expanded over time. PEA helps to:

- Identify key stakeholders, veto players, and informal power brokers,
- Assess whether policy commitments are likely to be implemented or reversed,
- Understand how formal rules and informal practices shape outcomes,
- Design strategies that build coalitions in favour of transition,
- Anticipate backlash and plan compensatory or sequencing measures.

Crucially, PEA reframes ambition. Rather than asking whether countries are willing to adopt global norms, it asks how climate objectives can be embedded within domestic political settlements through incentives, sequencing, and redistribution. Political economy is therefore not an external constraint, but a core design parameter for effective country platforms.

## Country Platforms in Practice

Country platforms are government-led mechanisms that align national development and climate objectives with international support to unlock public and private finance at scale. Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), the most visible examples, seek to accelerate fossil fuel phase-out (especially coal), expand renewable energy, and ensure that workers and communities affected by the transition are protected and supported.

These platforms operate at the intersection of domestic politics and international finance, making them particularly vulnerable to political contestation, coordination failures, and shifts in priorities among both governments and partners.

## Political Settlements and Platform Design

A political settlements approach focuses on two main factors affecting platform performance:

- **Power configuration (concentrated vs. dispersed):** how much de facto power is held by the country’s top leadership.
- **Social foundation (narrow vs. broad):** the range of influential insider groups capable of challenging or changing the settlement.

In dispersed political environments, reform is inherently contested and iterative, requiring sustained engagement with multiple actors beyond the central state. In more concentrated contexts, implementation may be faster and commitments more credible, but risks of exclusion and weak justice outcomes are higher unless inclusion is deliberately designed. Although typologies can serve as valuable diagnostic tools, some participants emphasized that they should not be used to justify the exclusion of countries with non-ideal political settlements from having country platforms. This was especially relevant in the current period when country platforms are being extended to other issue areas in countries with varying levels of political stability and state capacity. A thought-provoking conversation about the relationship between formal political economy models and practical day-to-day action ensued.

## Lessons from Experience

Experience from early platforms points to several practical lessons:

### **1. Inclusivity strengthens delivery capacity**

Broad participation by subnational governments, labour, communities, and private actors enhances implementation by mobilising skills, legitimacy, and resources the central state often lacks. Inclusion improves credibility and reduces the risk of implementation bottlenecks.

### **2. Political contestation is continuous, not episodic**

In many contexts, policy gains are provisional. Resistance from incumbents, shifting political alliances, and electoral cycles generate repeated pressure to dilute or reverse reforms. Platforms must be designed with the expectation of ongoing negotiation and defence of agreed pathways.

### **3. Justice is a political necessity**

Just transition measures—such as income support, reskilling, regional development, and social protection—are not optional add-ons. They are central to sustaining political support and preventing backlash, particularly in fossil-fuel-dependent regions.

### **4. Sequencing and pacing matter more than comprehensiveness**

Overly complex, front-loaded reform packages often exceed political and administrative capacity. Incremental approaches that prioritise early, visible benefits help build pro-transition constituencies and momentum for deeper reforms.

### **5. Winners must be created—and losers addressed—early**

Platforms are more durable when they generate tangible beneficiaries, such as new jobs, industries, or fiscal revenues. At the same time, credible compensation and adjustment mechanisms for those facing losses are essential to reduce resistance.

### **6. Centralised control is insufficient**

Even where national leadership is strong, successful platforms depend on



decentralised implementation by municipalities, utilities, firms, and communities. Over-centralisation increases the risk of delays and policy failure.

### 7. Flexibility is essential

Platforms must be able to adapt to changing (geo-) political conditions, leadership transitions, and economic shocks. Rigid designs risk becoming obsolete as political realities shift.

## Implications for Donors and Partners

International partners play a decisive role in shaping platform outcomes. Effective support requires donors to:

- **Align behind country-led priorities**, rather than imposing externally defined agendas or timelines.
- **Coordinate genuinely and act collectively**, reducing fragmentation, duplication, and competition among partners.
- **Commit for the long term**, recognising that political and institutional change unfolds over years, not funding cycles.
- **Support political as well as technical processes**, including stakeholder engagement, coalition-building, and communication.
- **Back ambition without trying to purchase it**, supporting pathways that are politically grounded rather than artificially inflated.
- **Accept adaptive and iterative approaches**, allowing platforms to evolve in response to political and economic realities.

Ultimately, successful energy transition country platforms are built not on technical blueprints alone, but on sustained political engagement, adaptive design, and realistic pathways for change grounded in domestic political economy.