



**Community Perspectives of the Transition  
from Coal to Green Energy- *“No one consulted  
us. They just do as they please”.***

October 2023

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Mobilize is currently undertaking a civil society campaign called Energy Comms to inform, to educate and engage communities about the country's current and future energy challenges and opportunities. This campaign was launched in February 2023 with the aim of informing, educating and educating people about the country's energy challenges and to provide easy-to-understand information about the Just Transition and the Energy Action Plan.

The project vision was to have an informed, educated, and engaged South African public on the country's current and future energy challenges and the best practical options for energy security.

In the months from April to August Mobilize conducted three rounds of FGDs in the selected communities with the same group of participants to document their experiences over the course of a few months (longitudinal study). Three reports were concluded and published.

### **Africa Climate Foundation (ACF) Project**

Mobilize engaged with ACF to extend the discussions to more communities that are directly experiencing projects around transitioning. These discussions sought to engage communities around their experiences of transitioning out or decommissioning of coal power stations (Transition-Out Communities- TOC) or transitioning into new projects on green energy (Transition In Communities-TIC) and what this meant for them, their communities and in the context of the current crisis including the constant power cuts and threats to the environment (climate crisis), as well as the economy and their livelihoods.

### **Methods**

Twenty focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the following provinces in South Africa: Western Cape, Kw-Zulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Free State, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga from the 4<sup>th</sup> of August to the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2023.

### **Findings**

#### **Insights from communities that are transitioning out (TOC)**

##### **Awareness of decommissioning of power stations and consultations on the processes**

Across focus groups, many participants were unaware of the decommissioning of the power stations, nor were they consulted by stakeholders with regards to the decommissioning of the coal terminals but are aware of government plans to shift from using coal to renewable energy. Participants also shared that decommissioning is an attempt to reduce the air pollution caused by the coal terminal which has caused health issues for their community, affected biodiversity, and has contributed to climate change marked by less rainfall in their area.

##### **Awareness and consultations on the Energy Transition**

Across focus groups, many participants acknowledged that they were aware of the energy transition. However, some said they were not consulted while others admitted being entirely unaware. Many reported gaining knowledge through social media, news, and engagement with trade unions working with mine workers. Participants emphasized that the energy transition involves the shift away from coal to renewable energy sources. This transition is seen as strategic move to mitigate loadshedding and power cuts, which are a concern to everyone.

### **Life with/without coal oil- bargaining with community livelihoods**

The discussion sparked diverse opinions across and within groups. Participants expressed concerns that ranged from the impact on livelihoods and the security of electricity supply to broader environmental concerns related to coal. A few other participants said they were unaware of the transition and its implications.

### **Why the transition?**

Across focus groups, participants emphasized that the transition is driven by the need to reduce air pollution which contributes to the climate change and health issues in mining communities. They viewed the shift as an opportunity to learn from countries such as China, particularly in terms of electricity generation through renewables.

### **The shift from coal- excuse or solution?**

A range of opinions were shared in the focus group discussions regarding the shift away from coal, including sentiments in support of and opposition to the transition. Supporters highlighted the potential health environmental benefits of transitioning from coal. On the other hand, those who are opposed viewed coal as relatively cheap and safe to use at home compared to other energy sources such as petrol and paraffin. The costs for alternative sources including solar were prohibitive. Furthermore, worries were expressed about the potential theft of solar panels. Participants added that alternatives pose financial challenges for individuals and the government as imported equipment and technologies are often required from Europe and other countries, incurring major financial costs, which the country can ill-afford. Other perceptions shared were that the government or people in positions of power are using the energy crisis and loadshedding as an excuse for corruption and embezzlement.

### **Thoughts on Decommissioning of Power Stations**

The participants explained that they foresee the economy suffering because of the decommissioning since using and selling coal contributes to economic activity and sustains livelihoods. The participants mentioned that neglected mines have created opportunity for illegal miners, “amazama zama” to do crime in various ways on the mines. Additionally, the participants asserted that they think the government is prematurely implementing the transition to compete with big economies like China and the USA, but the priority should be solving the energy crisis instead of exploring alternatives with unknown long-term outcomes. Participants also feel like South Africa has been pressured to participate in the Just Transition project while first world countries such as the USA lack commitment to the Paris Agreement

and are still using coal to generate power despite access to green technologies that can easily facilitate the transition.

### **How the transition can be Just for communities**

Many participants shared that they were not consulted on the transition, nor were they given information on the energy transition. They added that being informed and empowered would allow them to understand how the transition can benefit them, including communications and information to communities being inclusive of individuals that did not receive formal education, did not further their studies and those who do not speak English as their first language.

### **Perceived changes or developments due to the transition**

Participants mentioned that they would like to have their communities capacitated through being upskilled and reskilled in their respective sectors of employment and empowered about different roles and contributions with the transition. They added that the transition and its intended benefits must prioritise community needs and fulfil them in alignment with the constitution which prioritises their needs through transparency, fairness, and public participatory frameworks.

### **Socio-economic benefits due to the transition**

The participants also shared the expectations they have of the transition in changing their lives. They reiterated the issue of job creation and capacitating communities as a primary priority, and infrastructure development which would contribute towards the country's economic growth and ripple towards other issues related to unemployment. Emphasis was put on quality infrastructure being invested in, for instance, the current household solar panels for geysers are faulty, unusable and has increased the tariffs they pay for electricity which are already higher than what they can afford. They further attested that adequate research should be done on the transition, that is, renewable energy sources and their benefits or shortfalls, information collated and shared with communities to facilitate participation and for empowerment. There must be a prioritisation of higher education institutions having the relevant courses that prepare individuals to be able to contribute to the needs of the country.

### **Transition Insights from communities that are transitioning in (TIC)**

#### **What do communities understand?**

Most of the participants in the focus groups expressed that they were not aware of the Just Energy Transition, but those who were aware expressed that their awareness and understanding were limited. In most cases, the JET is linked with the move towards more rooftop solar and is also seen as a government plan to eradicate load shedding.

#### **A lack of consultations**

There has been a failure from the government to inform, engage and incorporate the views of communities on the JET. Communities that have some knowledge of the JET have all acquired it through secondary sources such as the internet, social media, and news outlets. The little consultation has mostly been from private companies and revolved around medium to large-scale infrastructure programmes such as the Jeffreys Bay Wind Farm. However, there is a view among participants that consultations with the private sector are one-sided in that

these serve more as information-sharing sessions because communities' views are not heard and not incorporated in decision-making.

### **Equity**

A JET framework according to the participants should be equitable in a way that it does not leave others behind. Communities in the different sessions have stressed that the government should not only focus on large-scale projects such as power generating plants, but special attention should also be paid to small-scale power generating solutions such as rooftop solar to shift reliance on the current systems that will soon be faced out.

### **Job creation and upskilling**

Communities are particularly interested in the potential job creation possibilities that can come with some of the developments outlined in the JET framework, however, there is an acknowledgement that the government and other stakeholders would have to upskill community members to ensure that they are competent to respond to such opportunities when they arise. There is a firm belief from the participants that the JET can potentially 'spark a new industrial revolution' for South Africa if done well.

### **Fears**

Due to the lack of consultations on South Africa's JET framework, there are some fears that participants have identified about some of the large-scale projects that have been earmarked for development in their areas. Firstly, some of the participants are fearful that they might lose control and access to their ancestral land that holds cultural, religious, and traditional meanings. Participants also spoke extensively about their fears that if the transition is not handled properly and people are not upskilled, there is a risk that the framework will exacerbate the country's already overwhelming unemployment crisis. There are fears that the JET framework is used by those in power as a bargaining tool to leverage resources and public sympathy for their political ambitions. In the Northern Cape, participants fear that the development of new large-scale infrastructure in the province will exacerbate the supply of basic services such as water in an already water-scarce region.

### **Corruption and the economy**

In sessions in which participants are aware of the transition, the conversations are sometimes characterized by a lack of trust in the government's ability to implement plans due to corruption and a lack of political will. Furthermore, there are fears that the funds meant for JET might be misused or stolen, and such can lead the government into a borrowing spree with potential negative impacts on the economy of the country. In another session, participants raised that the JET framework will not benefit developing countries like South Africa because some of the developed nations have shown a lack of commitment to the Paris Agreement citing the USA's withdrawal of 2017-2020.

### **Communication**

In almost all the sessions, participants suggested social media as the most accessible and preferred mode of communication because of its ability to reach individuals across ages and geography. Participants also suggested traditional broad-based communication programmes that involve school talks, community workshops, local radio, TV, posters/printed material, and town halls.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a substantial number of participants from the TIC and TOC communities conveyed their frustration with the persistent power challenges affecting their daily lives. Throughout the focus groups, many participants indicated a lack of awareness regarding the government's outlined plans, as presented in the JET framework, to transition towards sustainable, renewable sources of electricity generation and gradually phase out coal. Participants emphasized that coal plays a significant role in their lives, highlighting its affordability, utility for heating and cooking during power cuts, and how they have adapted their lifestyles to rely on coal for survival without electricity. Access to coal has also provided them with a dependable source of income across various employment sectors.

Participants in the TIC focus groups revealed limited understanding of the just transition policy framework, although they recognised its aim of reducing load shedding and decreasing adverse effects on the environment. Both TOC and TIC participants expressed a strong desire to actively participate and be consulted throughout the energy transition. They emphasised the importance of being engaged to ensure their rights are respected and to acquire knowledge about potential opportunities that could secure their livelihoods and those of their communities through the adoption of green energy solutions. Through active involvement, they hope to be empowered, have their concerns addressed, and gain confidence that the transition will ultimately benefit the entire nation.

# Introduction

## Context

Mobilize is currently undertaking a civil society campaign called Energy Comms to inform, educate and engage communities about the country's current and future energy challenges and opportunities. This campaign was launched in February 2023 with the following aims:

- To inform, educate, and engage South Africans about the country's current and future energy challenges.
- To initiate a non-aligned "persuasion programme" to equip civil society, business, labour, and other players with easy-to-understand information products that explain the move towards viable energy security (Just Transition) –with a strong focus on South Africa's economic development agenda.

The campaign encompassed a multi-pronged communication and research approach that included the following elements:

- I. **Communication Campaign:** This included creating a reasoned, rational, and responsible messaging to help inform the national debate around the country's energy situation and to explore practical options for energy security.
- II. **Intervention workshops:** This was anchored by an evidence-informed Toolkit that was used to inform and engage community members during workshops facilitated by trained Facilitators. These workshops were used to give information as well as create an opportunity for communities to ask questions about the energy crisis, Just Transition (JT), and the Energy Action Plan, etc.
- III. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** FGDs were conducted in selected communities in Gauteng (City of Johannesburg and West Rand) and KwaZulu-Natal (eThekweni and uMgungundlovu) to solicit community perspectives, opinions and experiences of the country's energy crisis including living with the constant power cuts (load shedding), views about the JT and EAP, etc.

The project vision was to have an informed, educated, and engaged South African public on the country's current and future energy challenges and the best practical options for energy security.

In the months from April to August Mobilize conducted three rounds of FGDs in the selected communities with the same group of participants to document their experiences over the course of a few months (longitudinal study). Each round used a slightly adapted FGD Guide with nuanced questions from one round to the next to ensure that the discussions were not repetitive but tracked sentiments and experiences over time. Three reports were concluded and published.

## Africa Climate Foundation (ACF) Project

Mobilize engaged with ACF to extend the discussions to communities that are directly experiencing either the transitioning-out or decommissioning of ageing coal power stations (Transition-Out Communities-TOC) or transitioning-in into new projects anchored on green



energy approaches (Transition-In Communities-TIC). These discussions (FGDs) sought to engage communities around their experiences of transitioning out or in and what this meant for the country, the communities and individual families in the context of the current crisis including the constant power cuts and threats to the environment (climate crisis), as well as the economy and their livelihoods.

## **Study Objectives**

The purpose of the study was to engage and gain insight from TOC and TIC communities in various provinces in South Africa to explore their understanding and perceptions of these transitions. The study was conducted to explore their views and experiences of the Just Transition (JT), including the new 'green' energy projects that are taking place or about to take place in their communities including, solar, wind and green hydrogen for generating electricity. This involved explorations into how this is affecting their lives and how they believe that as a country we can move towards an energy-secure future that is also environmentally sustainable or is less damaging to the environment in terms of pollution and climate change. The discussion also sought to gather their opinions about what can and needs to be done to address the energy and electricity crisis in the country. Additionally, the study explored what possible communication approaches could be used to increase people's awareness of load-shedding/power cuts and improve their response to the debates around the energy crisis.

The specific objectives were:

- To document issues of concern in communities on the national energy crisis and the energy debate.
- To track knowledge of initiatives to decommission power stations in specific communities, the consultations that took place with stakeholders and track community knowledge of an about the energy transition.

## **Methods**

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

Ten Facilitators were recruited to conduct two (2) focus groups each in the identified community using either a TIC FGD Guide or TOC FGD Guide appropriate for the community/study site. The training focused on building and strengthening their facilitation skills for focus groups, as well as specifically how to use the guide to facilitate meaningful conversations on the JT and other energy issues with the community members. They were also trained on using other supporting materials, monitoring and evaluation aspects of the study and the Mobilize App for admiration and reporting.

### **Study Design**

This was a qualitative study design. Twenty (20) FGDs were conducted from the 4<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 in the identified TOC and TIC sites. Groups were generally comprised of approximately 7-15 individuals. Focus group participants belonged to the same community and were stable members of the local community representing a spectrum of members from

youth, adults, and the elderly, and occupations including students, unemployed, employed, leaders, etc.), and gender.

Focus group discussions took place in the preferred language of participants. The languages used in the FGs included Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi isiZulu, IsiSwati, Afrikaans and English, the groups were conducted mainly in the languages the participants were comfortable with. The Facilitators used the focus group discussion guide to guide the discussion.

## **Study setting**

The FGDs were conducted in selected communities in the following provinces: Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, and Western Cape.

## **Eligibility criteria**

Permanent residents of the study communities who were 18 years and older were eligible to participate. All potential participants were required to agree to participate in the focus groups as part of this study.

## **Ethical considerations**

Participants in the focus groups were legal adults above the age of 18. Participants had the aims and objectives of the research explained to them at the recruitment stage and were provided with the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any point. Before starting with the FGDs, participants were required to go through and complete an online or physical informed consent form for their participation in the study. This covered their consent for the study. All participants were also required to complete an online attendance register which served to track the attendance of the permanent members of the community throughout the study per group discussion. The focus groups were conducted by trained Facilitators with experience in facilitation and community work.

## **Data capture and coding**

All focus groups were audio-recorded, and the audio was uploaded onto the Mobilize App. All audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English by qualified transcribers, then the transcripts were reviewed by the researchers for quality and accuracy. The data reviewed by the researcher was thematically coded based on emerging findings and areas covered in the discussion guide.

## **Study limitations**

### **Study design**

- The study was conducted in geographically defined regions (communities) in the Eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, and Western Cape. These regions were selected due to exposure and access to power stations in the respective provinces.

The study was conducted in predominantly Black African communities and in communities of a lower socio-economic demographic to explore and document the extent to which the decommissioning or plans to decommission power stations, and the energy transition affecting the mining community members of South African society. This means that the study may not reflect the experiences of people in more

affluent communities who may have better access to other sources of energy beyond those provided by the national power supplier, Eskom.

### **Data collection**

- The study participants were selected by the Facilitators and agreed to participate. This represents self-selection bias. It is not known how the people who decided to participate in the study differ from those who refused or were not approached by Facilitators for recruitment.
- Focus group discussions, by their nature, allow a sharing of ideas, experiences, and thoughts among a group of individuals around a common theme or experience. This may result in individual thoughts, ideas, and experiences being “cross-pollinated” by others within the same focus group. This means that participants’ responses are not independent but are intrinsically linked to and influenced by each other.
- The focus groups were conducted during an important period of constant power cuts in the country and the plans for the just transition for renewable energy resources to generate electricity in the country. The experiences shared in this report represent that reality.

### **Addressing the limitations**

The study was conducted in 10 different communities by 10 different Facilitators using 2 instruments (FGD Transition TOC and TIC Guide). This approach improved the validity of the findings as they are an accurate representation of the experiences shared within a group. Multiple groups conducted also improved the reliability of the findings as common experiences and ideas emerged across all 20 groups of the FGDs conducted.

## Findings

### Participant Demographics

A total of 227 participants took part in the study.

	Province	Community/Power Station	Gender			
			Male	Female	Other/GNC	Total
<b>Transition In</b>						
	Eastern Cape	Jeffreys Bay Wind Farm	7	15		22
	Western Cape	Ankerlig Power Station	12	11		21
	Northern Cape	Kimberley, Kenhardt	10	27	1	38
<b>Transition Out</b>						
	Free State	Lethabo Power Station	7	12		19
	Limpopo	*Matimba Power Station	14	15		29
	Mpumalanga	Komati Power Station Grootvlei Power Station Duvha Power Station	21	49	1	71
	KwaZulu-Natal	Richards Bay	19	6		22
<b>Total</b>			90	135	2	227

The findings of the study will be structured to represent the views and sentiments of communities that are transitioning out (TOC), followed by communities that are transitioning in (TIC).

### Insights from communities that are transitioning out (TOC)

#### Awareness of decommissioning of power stations and consultations on the processes

The participants were asked if they were aware of the decommissioning and or plans to decommission the power stations in their respective communities. In addition, they were asked if they were consulted about the plans to decommission. Across focus groups, many participants were unaware of the decommissioning of the power stations, nor were they consulted by stakeholders with regards to the decommissioning of the coal terminals but are aware of government plans to have the country shift from using coal to renewable energy. In a Mpumalanga community, the participants attested that they were consulted by the minister of electricity and the consultations were with the mine workers and not the community at

large, while in other communities, the members were only informed upon the implementation of the decommissioning as part of other government plans.

*Facilitator: So, my first question says since we have this power station [name], that we have already been notified it will be decommissioned...that is, the power station will retire and will no longer generate electricity, are you aware of this? If yes or no, were you consulted by anyone about this process??*

*W: I was aware, but I found out through social media.*

*W1: Even on the news since Komati closed, they said these will follow but they said it won't be shutdown. You remember when we were visited by the minister of electricity... Of energy, sorry. He visited with Eskom and said they will no longer shut it down... [he visited] Late last year, after he had just been appointed. While he was making his rounds. (Mpumalanga FGD 1)*

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*W: No one consulted us. They just do as they please.*

*N4: I was never informed about the change in energy supply. We only learned about it when it was implemented. (Free State FGD)*

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*M: We were informed about the change because they were households owing electricity, there were those who illegally connected electricity. So, this affected the power supply at the power station. Most households have illegally connected electricity, and they are stealing electricity from Eskom.*

*JN: Another one?*

*N1: We were informed about the change, even though we were not told about the reason for the change. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

For a KZN community, the participants were asked about their views on the coal mining terminal and the implications on their family and community. The participants shared that they were not informed or knowledgeable about the power station in their area as nothing is communicated with them. To the best of their knowledge, the terminal is functioning optimally that they are surprised by the energy deficiencies faced by the country resulting in loadshedding. The participants added that they were aware of coal being exported to various countries and did not understand why South Africa cannot continue using coal to generate electricity. In addition, the trucks that transport the coal cause accidents in the area resulting in deaths of community members and other people using the roads. Other participants shared that the air pollution caused by the coal terminal has caused health issues for their community, affected biodiversity, and has contributed to climate change marked by less rainfall in their area. Other sentiments involved that the coal terminal helps sustain their livelihoods through the creation of jobs for community members.

*BK: The question is, what is your view about coal mining and coal terminal in [community]? And then the follow-up question says how does the terminal being here affect you and your family or your community?*

*M1: Greetings. My name is [name redacted]. The knowledge I have about coal terminal in Richard's Bay is that its still functioning in the right way, but the problem we have as people is that we don't have an understanding of what is happening right now, because we can see that there is a problem with Transnet. We can see that trains are no longer working but there are a lot of trucks transporting coal, and this is causing problems on our roads. Yes, we know that there is a problem due to loadshedding, but we don't understand what is happening because no one briefed us. I believe there is a lot of people with the same problem, they want to know what is happening. Why do we have a lot of trucks. We know that we are importing coal overseas, but we are not sure if the supply is high or there is a sabotage at Transnet or at the depot at large. We don't know what is going on.*

*M2: My name is [name redacted]. Thank you very much for the question. I do not have much knowledge about how the coal terminal operates, however, as a person who is living around people who have*

*asthma and other chronic diseases, the smoke and other byproducts that are emitted from such industries have been a bit of an effect because the air is polluted. Therefore, it affects our life as well as our health because diseases that are chronic are treated easy when you start and there is medication. For example, TB and asthma, but as the person continue to be constantly exposed to such, the medication ends up not working. So, so how I wish that the coal terminals could be far away from places where people stay because whether we like it or not, it is affecting us.*

*M3: My name is [name redacted]. The availability of coal terminal here in Richards Bay, there is pollution and having pollution causes climate change. Another thing that is positive about having the terminal here in [community] is that the economy in [community] will grow, but at the same time there is pollution that can cause diseases and other things like asthma and other lung diseases caused by the smoke coming from the coal. (KZN FGD)*

## **Awareness and consultations on the Energy Transition**

Across focus groups, many participants attested that they were aware of the energy transition but were not consulted on it while others said that they were unaware of it. For many the knowledge was through social media, following news broadcasts, and through trade unions that help protect mine workers against exploitation amongst various labour issues. When asked what they knew about the transition, the participants attested that the energy transitions involve the shift away from coal to renewable energy sources so that there can be a reduction in loadshedding and power cuts in the country. Other participants mentioned that the transition is aimed at reducing air pollution since it causes illness within communities while also damaging the environment. For participants that were unaware of the energy transition they said they were not consulted by any stakeholders, thus, they were unclear what changes the transition would bring since there is a lack of grassroots-based communication in terms of the plans that are put in place to facilitate the transition. These were blamed on the lack of structure and governance which facilitate public participation within the government, that is, municipalities, community social forums (CSF), and through the mining charter which was said to be a communication forum to discuss mining issues in communities. Due to this, the participants expressed concerns for their livelihoods as they were not consulted and no long-term implications on the communities were discussed to better understand the lived realities on the grassroots.

*Facilitator: The first question says are you aware of the energy transition that is happening here in [community]? And were you consulted about the energy transition? And what do you know about energy transition?*

*M1: I know about it.*

*M2: I am also aware about the change of electricity.*

*W: No one consulted us. They just do as they please.*

*N4: I was never informed about the change in energy supply. We only learned about it when it was implemented. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

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*UF1: Nobody has consulted us.*

*UF2: Everyone does as they please, we only see them doing things.*

*UF3: I was not aware about the energy transition.*

*UF5: I know nothing, I don't want to lie. (Free State FGD)*

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*UM: Yeah...The issue of Just Energy transition, my understanding tells me that it's just an element in which they are trying to correct the climate change issue, because climate change is caused by air pollution as she has said. And air pollution is caused by the smoke from the power stations and petrol and diesel. All of them pollute... at the ocean, there is something which they call [inaudible 00:14:54], so the smoke pollutes that [inaudible 00:14:59] and it makes the sun to be hotter to the extent that it affects people, and they get cancer. So, on our side, especially in South Africa or African countries, it's unfair to us because the type of electricity they want to use is solar and the one generated by wind which they are already doing in Western Cape. (Limpopo FGD)*

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*M: Yes, we are aware that the government wants to change the way they supply electricity. They want to use things like windmill and solar panels.*

*F1: Yes, I was aware because these are not discussions that started now. If I recall well, this started between 2016 or 2017, whereby the former president was talking about introducing solar panels and it was just a thought then to produce electricity using nuclear and other things.*

*W2: As the communities since there is local from the factories, so the transitions that are happening around the industry were not communicated. It's not communicated to the communities and even our community leaders we thought are representing us to such forums for the industries, whatever transitions are going on around, they don't get back to us and give feedback after sitting in those meetings. So whatever changes happening locally, we don't know not unless you get the information through reading newspapers or maybe by watching TV, you just get the information on your own not through our local leaders. (KZN FGD)*

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*W: I was aware, I remember last year or early this year. Nehawu went to fight against the shutdown. They came to recruit people within our community saying that we must go there. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

## **Life with/without coal oil- bargaining with community livelihoods.**

The participants were also asked to share their opinions on the implications of coal for their communities and families. This discussion elicited different opinions across and within groups ranging from concerns around livelihoods, security of the electricity supply to concerns about the implications of coal on the environment as well as being unaware of the transition and its implications. The sections below summarise these views and sentiments.

### **Concerns about livelihoods**

Across focus groups, the participants mentioned that coal sustains their livelihoods, contributes to the community economy while alleviating poverty. Other sentiments included beliefs that coal is the only secure source of energy that is contributing to the country's economy, and that they trust and are hopeful will end loadshedding caused by the energy crisis. The participants also shared their perceptions on living without coal, including firstly that, life would be challenging as the shift compromises their livelihoods as a community through job losses by skilled people in mining, and in other forms of trade such as street traders. For many participants, unemployment and poverty rates were mainly concerning since they are already high, therefore, job losses due to technology taking over many sectors will further perpetuate poverty, crime and other social ills which are prevalent in the communities. To remedy job losses for skilled workers, participants suggested the prioritisation of upskilling and reskilling to ensure that people who are already working can keep their sources of income. The participants added that eliminating the use of coal would

result in economic decline across categories, more loadshedding and further struggles since coal sustains them in various ways such as cooking, and heating. Participants also mentioned that the country would lose investments and other economic benefits from exporting coal to other countries. Due to the transition and uncertainties, they foresee future generations reverting to using “old ways” for heating, cooking, and lighting including candles and firewood amongst others.

*Facilitator: Okay. What does life with coal/oil mean for you and your community? Anyone?*

*N4: In my opinion, I think if we have coal and oil in the community, it means that the community economy will be boosted because our towns will have resources. And secondly, this will create job opportunities within our communities. We will have people with skills and will be able to work in the mines. We will have less poverty. That is my opinion.*

*N1: The availability of coal and oil in the community means that we will always have electricity since these things are used to produce electricity.*

*W1: Families will die of hunger.*

*W: We are going to suffer.*

*W: I think this is where the fourth industrial revolution comes in, machines are taking over people's jobs and the government or these people are being inconsiderate of the people that depend on these things. (Mpumalanga FGD).)*

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*UM: According to me, it's going to create shortage of work because when Medupi and Matimba started, there was no public participation as to the discussions about starting that power station and for people to work there, which skills they need. Even now we have government, but people are quiet, they don't ask the authority that since there is a lack of capacity in our community...person says it's for political parties and of which it's not about the parties, it's about the governance and getting information and making sure that our voices are heard in issues which we are not comfortable with. So most of our people are ignorant sometimes and sometimes they just don't have the right information and we don't know about things which are happening. But in my opinion, the issue with coal is going to destroy a lot of jobs.*

*UM: For me firstly, the issue that they are planning to stop us from using coal, I don't like it because coal is one of the natural resources on which our economy comes from. So if you stop using coal, it means that the economy is going to collapse and once that happens, it means there poverty and unemployment rate will go up. So it will not solve it, instead, they could come up with corrective measures as to how do we correct this without the economy collapsing and without people losing their jobs. It's what they are supposed to do, corrective measures are what's needed but the problem is that they make decisions on their own, they are not coming here to allow us to give our input. (Limpopo FGD)*

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*M8: My name is [name redacted]. Life with coal is great. We are able to buy coal from the shops. We can easily access coal. We can braai meat using coal and meat braai from coal is very nice. Secondly, coal is used for a number of things. Coal can produce a lot of things. So, closing coal mines will cause us to find new ways of producing things so that we can be able to access those things like when we have coal. So, life with coal is great and in terms of employment, it's a good thing because there is a lot of people who survive because of coal. Even the economy of the country is boosted by the production of coal, because we export coal on a daily basis. Coal brings in money here in South Africa. So, life without coal is not going to be a nice one, it will be life with no money.*

*M3: In my opinion, even if the coal can be removed from us, we will not see any difference because we will continue struggling as we are struggling even now. Whether we have coal or not, we don't see the change because we have mines where coal is produced, and we still don't see any difference because we are not benefiting from it. It might be better for us now, but it shows that our future generation is*



*still going to struggle more than us. When one look at it you can see that our children will continue to struggle like us... and if you look at it you could see that people in the future will go back to using the old ways of having lied where candles will be used. This is totally unacceptable. (KZN FG)*

### **Concerns about the environment**

Other participants opined that the transition to no coal is necessary to preserve the environment and contribute towards green initiatives. Further supporting sentiments that were shared included that many other countries are surviving through generating electricity using renewable energy sources, and so, South Africa and citizens would be able survive without coal and oil.

*W9: I believe permanently stopping from using the coal, could be assisting in a way that it could lead to better biodegradable solutions and that means that we'd be living in a greener planet which we should be encouraging.*

*M: I think it would be a good thing if we stop using coal and oil because there are other countries that survive well without having coal and oil. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

Other participants shared that they were not informed enough to make any contributions as to the implications of living with or without coal as they did not receive information from the government and other relevant stakeholders on the energy transition and the shift from using coal. Other concerns included language barriers as contributors to the communication breakdown through the jargon used to describe the transition as “Just”. For participants, the transition being “just”, implies a redundant process which they would rather not have further destabilise their lives. Due to this lack of and or exclusive forms of communication and knowledge sharing, the participants mentioned that they end up being excluded from working in the coal mines in their areas and empowering themselves through other skills in demand since they do not know which opportunities to take advantage of. Participants also expressed a lack of faith in the transition as a result.

*M1: I think the view I have will take us back a bit, we are not well informed about a lot of things. From the knowledge that we have, we know that coal is the main contributor of our economy in South Africa, and we also treat it as fuel. And at the same time, we treat it as a mineral that is so powerful. That is why we are also exporting it to other countries. And we also use coal to produce electricity. We are not well informed about all these changes, and we don't know what is going to happen. This makes us not to have good understanding of what is really happening. As a result, we are not confident of what does it mean to have coal in [community]. As a community at large we end up being confused and we don't know.*

*M2: All I can say is that for us it doesn't not make a difference because you find that, having a company like this, when it comes to job opportunities and informing communities about what is happening in the community, we have very limited information. You find that most of the people who come and work in those companies are people from other provinces and other countries even. Only to find that local people, they are not even getting contracts. So, for me having it here or not having them does not make any difference because we don't know. Even when there are programs to train people only a few will be given an opportunity to participate because information are shared to the people from the inside. I don't know how to explain this, but this does not change our lives in any way... (KZN FGD)*

## Why the transition?

Across focus groups, participants asserted that the transition is happening due to the need to reduce air pollution which contributes to the climate change and illness in mining communities, this was said to be an opportunity to learn from countries such as China in terms of generating electricity using renewables.

*Facilitator: All right. The other question is why do you think that this transition is happening?*

*M9: The reason why the country decided to stop using coal to generate electricity is that the country is conscious about the climate change. And also, there are countries that we can say are exemplary, that are not using coal, but they don't have issues with loadshedding. For an example China, whereby you find that the demand of electricity is high. So, only to find out that the coal we have maybe does not meet the requirement standard. So, that means that the country we are in can learn from other countries that are not using coal to generate electricity. So, it shows that the country is conscious about climate change.*

*M10: The reason for changing from using coal to generate electricity, I think its something that can help in some way, because digging coal from the mine will end up causing air pollution and that can end up causing diseases just like they mentioned before. So, I think it will assist in reducing the number of people who will get sick.*

*W2: I think it's because they're trying to reduce the effects of climate change. It's fine, as much as valley we are just worried about the money. We're not looking at the bigger picture. It's understandable. They're trying to reduce all this climate change because coal was releasing a lot of harmful chemicals. And we all know that the ozone layer is dying and whatnot. I think that's what they're trying to succeed in make a better, even the ecosystem is, like getting disturbed in everything. I think that's what they trying to reduce or fix, can't be fixed. But they tried to reduce that, the harm of the effect. (KZN FGD)*

## The shift from coal- excuse or solution?

Mixed feelings were shared across the focus group discussions, including sentiments in support of the transition to better people's health from complications (respiratory diseases and cancer) caused by the pollution, and to reduce environmental pollution in the communities and the country at large. These came with some doubt about the alternatives that will be used and the duration it will take for them to stabilise the national grid and or start being problematic like coal. One that was mentioned was nuclear which in their opinion has its own pros and cons for human life and the environment including explosions, and that the transition may take years, therefore there will still be loadshedding until the process has been fully figured out. Participants in Mpumalanga asserted that they do not wish to shift from coal since it is cheap and relatively safe for them to use at home compared to other energy sources such as petrol and paraffin. Additionally, they expressed a concern with the costs of using solar panels in their communities as they are said to be expensive, and subject to be stolen by criminals for sustenance. Additional concerns on other alternatives were expressed as too expensive as well for the government and stakeholders in that imported equipment to build the new energy plants from Europe and other international countries is going to be expensive which will further have the country run at a loss financially to facilitate the transition. In contrast, some participants felt that South Africa being part of the BRICS international community guarantees that there will be support available in many capacities

to assist with the transition when there is a need. With concerns on how the power plants will be built and the financing, there are also concerns on the land that will be used to build them and implications on community displacements, and the possibility of closing tourist sites which create jobs and bring in foreign currency.

Further, the participants expressed doubt with using solar in that during rainy season or winter they believe they would not have electricity because of low sunlight/ limited daylight hours. Other perceptions shared were that the government or people in positions of power are using the energy crisis and loadshedding as an excuse to steal money. For participants, there is no need for the transition as loadshedding can be reduced or done away with if there is a prioritisation of using coal in the country instead of exporting it to other countries. The participants also reiterated concerns around people losing their jobs and their small businesses which compromises the survival of their families. Emphasis was further put on reskilling and upskilling community members so that they can have employment and provide for their families- additional costs for training were accounted for by the community members. In addition, participants expressed a deep dissatisfaction at not being given adequate information to be able to contribute effectively to the national debates on the energy crisis.

*Facilitator: How do you feel about the move away from using a coal as the main source of energy?*

*Group: We do not want it*

*W: We do not want it because coal is safe, number one. Once we start using fuel like petrol and paraffin their prices increase. Once we start using solar panels, their prices increase too. But coal is always there at home, once electricity goes off, we use the coal stove. Coal is safe. See gases explode in Johannesburg, solar panels are stolen in broad daylight and on rainy days there is no electricity.*

*W1: They claim there is a shortage, there is no shortage they just want to steal some money.*

*N4: I can say that there are advantages and disadvantages for doing that because they are going to introduce nuclear power and we don't know the advantages and disadvantages of that. We can get excited and say that coal causes infection and people working in the mines end up having TB, but I don't think the nuclear power will not only have positive impacts. Most households in South Africa use coal and now we will only supply our neighbouring countries with coal. In my opinion, I think this could be good and bad at the same time.*

*M4: I think it's a good thing because the government will be more innovative and finding a better solution because we all know what coal does in terms of people's health.*

*W: I think the green energy idea is a good thing because we are not going to have load shedding. Its going to be okay because we are no longer going to experience loadshedding. That's what I think. Even though it's going to take years. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

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*UM: Yeah, solar system. There is that trend where they are being stolen now. So I don't know, it's another area of concern because obviously people are discouraged and when they look at that, you see they say agh, what is the use? Because some people are very proactive, they are not waiting for the handouts, they are doing it for themselves because they're suffering because there is load-shedding. So if they are proactive and some people now start stealing, it's very problematic. So maybe part of safety also, the Government and the private sector must come together and make sure that they put the necessary infrastructure so that the transition is smooth, it's happening. (Free State FGD)*

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*M5: Just like the government has indicated that we have moved away from using coal, we are in a revolution now, so this will come from the government to say what will happen to the people who were producing the coal, are they going to lose their jobs or what is going to happen to them? Because right now we are going to have a problem where people are going to be fired and retrenched.*

M13: *I think what is needed I this transition is knowledge, to explain to us as the citizens in general terms, in simple terms, that you can understand. They must not hide information from us about the advantages of using this, generating power from the renewable resources, on how they are going to benefit us and what not. We also need to know the downfalls. We also need to know that disadvantages, how is it going to affect us socioeconomically, because as he has already indicated that there will be loss of jobs. There will be a need to have educated people basically, so that they are able to use this new thing.*

M13: *...if we change here, we need to know, you know. We need to get genuine testimonies, so that we know what is going to happen because we know the citizens does not benefit from such things it's people who are richer, who are stakeholders and benefit from such things. We end up being the victims. So, I think it's important that we know about this so that we can know whether it will work for us and our families. If there is going to be a change, the people who are currently working, they need to be trained, there must be learnership programs where they will be trained for free. They need to know how they will change from the work they are currently doing to the new one so that they are able to fit in perfectly to the job description of the new job that they will be doing. We don't want people from outside the country to come and work here in South Africa whereas we have local people who are not working. We are just citizens here in South Africa we don't know what is happening we just see trucks coming in to deliver coal. We don't even know the type of the coal they are bringing, how and what is used to produce it, all those things we need to know. It must not seem like we are just some lab rats that are used for some experiment.*

M12: *Moving away from using coal to generate electricity, will have cost implications. We need more, we need new generators for other ways of generating electricity without coal. That will have cost implications and we need people who will be trained about the way of generating electricity because it will be different from the way we are currently using. So, in that way, you will find that people will need to be trained. So, that will also have cost implications for that.*

M11: *Just like I said before South Africa will lack economically. South Africa does not have the capacity to produce windmill equipment's. They are produced in countries like Europe. They will have to be imported to South Africa. With that being said, we will run at a loss. We also have the hydroelectric, like the electricity produced from water. This means that dams will be closed down as tourist destinations because they will be used to produce electricity. This will be our new way to produce electricity. This means that people will no longer visit South Africa as their tourist destination.*

M2: *I think that the new system will benefit us, hopefully, because the coal system that we are currently using is not working as we always have load shedding almost every day. And we have load shedding several times in a day. It means the new system will work because we will not be using coal and the countries that are part of BRICS committed to assist South Africa with the load shedding crisis. So, I believe that the new system will work as we also have funding support (KZN FGD)*

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UM: *I understood your question and I don't think it's the right thing. I am saying that because this thing will always be there, because remember now, if they stop the power stations because of air pollution, the new system which they are implementing is going to cause another pollution. So that means it will never change, the more something is used continuously or too much, it's the more it will bring pollution. So I think this thing with the power stations if fine. (Limpopo FGD)*

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UF: *So for this thing to happen, is it going to be us who are spending (paying)? I think they are going to try and find a way to tax us so that it happens.*

UF: *But it's like that, you see the petrol and diesel have gone up now?*

UM: *But if the Private sector and the Government can play a part to meet us half-way, maybe to install the infrastructure to our households. Then it will at least meet us halfway so that we don't feel that transition. But also remember now people are so disillusioned because there is something that is a trend today where people are stealing the same energy. (Free State FGD)*

## Thoughts on Decommissioning of Power Stations

The participants were also asked to share their thoughts on the decommissioning of power stations in their communities. They explained that they foresee the economy suffering as a result of the decommissioning since using and selling coal contributes to economic activity and sustains livelihoods. As a result, the participants communicated that they would be more supportive of the transition as incorporating coal through the energy mix instead of doing away with it altogether. They added that the mines can continue exporting coal internationally to continue getting money through trade and using the coal to contribute to stabilising the energy grid which will do away with loadshedding, while also polluting less on the environment. There were also suggestions for the government and stakeholders to invest in carbon technology to reduce emissions since the participants do not believe in “safely destroying” power stations. Safety concerns that were raised included that the mining land might be used to build houses and other buildings which may be dangerous as the ground will be unstable. This came with assertions that many of the plans and approaches towards the energy transition and the just energy policy frameworks were unclear and communicated so they [participants] do not know what measures are put in place to mitigate certain possible incidents. In a Free State focus group, the participants mentioned that neglected mines have created opportunity for illegal miners, “*amazama zama*” to do crime and commit other crimes on the mine lands in the area. Assertions also support decommissioning provided that the government keeps to their word and uses funds towards their intended purposes. Due to previous mismanagement of funds, participants suspect the government and stakeholders are suspected of monopolising within their relevant spaces to benefit themselves through mismanaging funds.

Other concerns raised include whether the new infrastructure for renewables will be maintained or neglected like the existing coal terminals in the country. Additionally, the participants asserted that they think the government is prematurely implementing the transition to try and compete with big economies like China and the USA, but the focus or priority should be solving the energy crisis instead of exploring alternatives with unknown long-term outcomes. Participants also feel like South Africa has been pressured to participate in the Just Transition project while first world countries such as the USA lack commitment to the Paris Agreement and are still using coal to generate power despite having access technologies that can easily facilitate the energy transition. Other participants shared that they think it is a good idea to decommission the power stations and transition to using renewable sources of energy to generate electricity. This is because the coal causes health issues such as TB, asthma, and other respiratory issues, while also polluting the environment, therefore the shift will contribute towards lessening the implications of coal on these. The participants did however acknowledge that there will be implications on people’s jobs, and they are not hopeful that the government and stakeholders will prioritise communities and people that are most affected as they are known using their own networks to enrich themselves and maintain the inequality gap in the country.

*Facilitator: What are your thoughts on making our coal power stations in operative, safely destroyed, or rehabilitated?*

*M5: I feel like our economy can drop and a lot of people will be unemployed as a lot of coal stations will be closed. A lot of people will lose their jobs and not able to work.*

- M2: Closing coal stations will be a good idea because we will be reducing global warming that is caused by coal and at the same time is not a good thing as people will lose their jobs.
- W9: I feel like for the coal stations to be closed will be the greatest decision as it has already caused damage to people's health, and you cannot rehabilitate a place that is already surrounded by badness as said global warming or just diseases in general.
- N4: I think closing the coal stations would be a good thing because they used to function well during apartheid time because they used to maintain them. They were not misusing funds for their own benefit or create their own tenders to transport coal.
- M: They should rather introduce technology for carbon capture for us not to emit a lot of carbon on the other side we can also use green energy so that we see how far we go. Because this Just Transition Energy for now is not reliable. If it was reliable, the very same people that propose the Just Transition thing would not come all the way to purchase coal from us. For as long as our is still exported it just simply means this just transition thing is indeed not reliable. (Mpumalanga FGD)
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UM: It's happening with the Zama-Zama's now where there were mines, products were accepted from mines and those mines are left as they are. So there was no rehabilitation, that's why we are standing with that problem even today where people are committing serious heinous crimes in those mines because they are sponsoring violence and whatever...we are observing the international trend, and obviously the very same powerful countries are still using coal energy or fossil fuel energy because they depend on that. I am mentioning America because they don't want to be involved in [inaudible] you know, energy talks. So talk is cheap, they just talk but they don't send their representatives and they don't put their signatures. Obviously, they are very powerful countries. (Free State FGD)

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M2: I agree with the idea of destroying the coal stations. Because we have people like me who have asthma and other diseases like sinuses and others. Such people get affected from the power stations because of the smoke that comes out from there and cause pollution. But at the same time if the land that was used for those mines is not being used, then the whole process would be useless. There will not be funding to maintain the land.

W1: I really think that the power stations can be destroyed. Why am I saying that? Its because the new system that we say we are trying to move towards it, we haven't seen whether it will work or not... So, I think maybe if we can say 50-50 because in actual fact even if they are destroyed, I don't think the land, would be right to be used for other things like building houses on it used to plough plants.

M1: Now that South Africa is thinking of implementing this new method, I want us to look at the relevant costs for implementing the new system. Let's say we have seen it implemented in other countries like China, we need to check how big is China's economy and check the costs. We cannot compare ourselves with a country that has 6 billion and we only have 2 billion. So, if that country was successful in implementing the method, we might have little chance of succeeding. If we close those mines and start implementing, it means that we will wait until we have electricity.

M13: I think what is needed I this transition is knowledge, to explain to us as the citizens in general terms, in simple terms, that you can understand. They must not hide information from us about the advantages of using this, generating power from the renewable resources, on how they are going to benefit us and what not...There will be a need to have educated people basically, so that they are able to use this new thing. (KZN FGD)

## **How the transition can be Just for communities**

Many participants shared that they were not consulted on the transition, nor were they given information on the energy transition underway in the country. In a KZN focus group, the participants emphasised that the transition would only be successful if government and stakeholders in the energy sector are transparent, honest, and forthcoming about the details

of the transition. One participant said “Can you just have good genuine leaders? ...We need good genuine leaders out here.” The participants also expressed that they were aware of international countries still using coal to generate energy and are questioning the real reasons for the transition in South Africa, why the government is prioritising the transition and the environmental implications in first world countries versus developing countries. They added that being informed and empowered would allow them to understand the various ways the transition can benefit them, which guarantees a buy in from them. They also proposed that communications and information sent out or shared with communities must be simplified to be inclusive of individuals that did not receive formal education, did not further their studies and those who do not speak English as their first language. Other suggestions for the transition to be just involve the prioritisation of community members when job opportunities arise. For participants, skilled people from various parts of the country end up moving into their towns, and benefiting from what they feel is rightfully theirs since being excluded disadvantages their ability to provide for their families. This is why they suggested upskilling, reskilling, and investments in their communities to have them thrive economically and not continue to live in poverty.

*W4: I think what is needed is a detailed explanation so that if we okay it's not like they're asking for our opinion, they are telling us it just sounds like they're asking for our opinion because that's how it's always been. I think what we need is a detailed explanation because this doesn't make sense to me. It leaves here and it goes overseas, what's the point? What is it going to do overseas, it won't emit carbon dioxide. I don't understand. I am lost... I want to know the reason behind it being moved from here to the there. How different is it going to operate there different from the way its operating here.*

*W2: A transition is not a thing as its community has, having a different people, we have people who are not educated, so that when whatever explanation they're going to make, it must just come to their level of understanding. And again, they must also explain the impact of whatever implementation that they're going to make, as we have already explained that our community is suffering in terms of a pollution because this thing comes back to us, when it comes back to us, nobody cares.*

*W: I feel like what I'm going to say it's going to be more of like asking for something that just doesn't exist. Can you just have good genuine leaders? As much as I know that's like a fantasy. We need good genuine leaders out here. We cannot be having the richer becoming richer and the poor becoming poor because everything they're doing is for their benefit. So, it's more of like this capitalist thingy is going to succeed one way or another. Whilst we are just there, we stuck with struggling say no socialism is coming. It's not coming. Can we have good leaders? Simple, good, straightforward, honest leaders. (KZN FGD)*

## **Perceived changes or developments due to the transition**

The participants were asked to share the perceived changes or developments in their communities because of the energy/just transition project. Participants mentioned that they would like to have their communities capacitated through being upskilled and reskilled in their respective sectors of employment and empowered about different roles and contributions with the transition. They added that the transition and its intended benefits must prioritise community needs and fulfil them in alignment with the constitution which prioritises the needs of the citizens through transparency, fairness, and public participatory frameworks amongst others. Participants also shared that they would like to see declines in

the unemployment rate which will alleviate poverty in their communities. The participants also raised a concern on what use the land would be for after the decommissioning of power stations. Due to this, others reiterated that they would prefer that the transition does not happen regardless of health issues and the environmental effects since there are no convincing alternatives that have been put forward in terms of replacing coal as the main source of energy and many people's lives will be destabilised.

*IV: Okay, the next question says what changes or developments would you like to see with the Energy Transition?*

*UM: Even the community, we want to benefit for our needs as the community. They should make sure that we benefit and then it empowers after empowering us, it should motivate us. They will see how they can motivate us. If they could give us three things, empower us, give us skills and capacitate us with everything which we need, then it would be better, and we would allow it.*

*Facilitator: Hm, so you want to see skills development as one of the things which you would like to see happening?*

*[Group] Yes.*

*UM: The first consideration is the community needs, that's all. (Limpopo FGD)*

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*UM: More jobs for people. Initially I said that the Government must try by all means to reskill people with this energy transition. So obviously if people are retrained, obviously it's not going to affect the households because those are the people who are making sure that they put bread on the table. So if definitely it affects people positively, then there is no problem, so people will appreciate and will embrace energy.*

*UF: And before the transition takes place, there should be a platform where they tell the [community] residents that this and this is what's going to happen... So, we will need to know about the positive and the negative sides, they should inform us in details that here are the negative things that will happen and here are the positive. (Free State FGD)*

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*M: They can use the place as a business site to create jobs for the people who have been working in the mines because there is a lot of things that we don't have in our country, and they can use this as an opportunity to create them. So, they can see what they can do there.*

*W: They won't be able to use it for agriculture. Remember that land was used as a mine. This is not a land that is right for agricultural purposes. This is not the soil that could be used for planting.*

*W: I would say that they should just continue using it because a lot of people will lose their jobs, we would rather be affected by the air pollution than for people to lose their jobs. It must not be closed. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

### **Socio-economic benefits due to the transition**

The participants also shared their expectations for the transition and how it could possibly change their lives. Job creation and empowering communities were underscored as primary priorities. They emphasised the critical need for infrastructure development in their communities, foreseeing it as a key driver for the country's economic growth with a positive ripple effect on unemployment and related socio-economic challenges. Quality infrastructure investment was highlighted, particularly regarding the current household solar



panels for geysers, which they said were faulty, unusable and have increased the tariffs they pay for electricity which are already higher than what they can afford.

The participants also shared that they are looking forward to seeing renewable energy infrastructure built or installed on land and spaces that are unused, and in people's households to ensure optimisation with contributing to stabilising the energy grid and have reduced loadshedding. Beyond this, the participants added that they look forward to less crime rates, and reduced prices/costs of electricity compared to what they are currently paying. They further attested that adequate research should be done on the transition, that is, renewable energy sources and their benefits or shortfalls, information collated and shared with communities to facilitate participation and empower them in the process. Additionally, there must be a prioritisation of higher education institutions having the relevant modules and courses that prepare individuals to be able to contribute to the needs of the country. This will lessen the reliance on foreign labour and having qualified locals relocating to international countries and contributing to their development and economic progress.

However, some participants reiterated their concerns and lack of confidence in the government plans since their local economy due to the adverse impact of load shedding, leading to business closures and job losses. They feared that the uncertainties that come with the transition would most likely worsen the situation and further disadvantage them. Another factor of concern is the prevalent misuse of funding within government institution which results in many development initiatives not trickling down to communities that they are intended for.

*JN: The question is, what are you looking forward to the energy transition?*

*W9: I can say is I think my community itself can achieve and benefit from this change social economically in terms of redistribution, redressing and also it can lead to a fixation in the imbalances of the past. So, I believe that things such as development in infrastructure, creation of jobs for the youth, and better standards of living and an increase in our GDP would be one of those benefits.*

*N4: I would like to say that my community is not benefiting from this because the more we have loadshedding, many companies are reducing their staff and others are closing down. There will be less job opportunities. We have to make fire to use as source of energy and its hot at the same time. I don't see it benefiting us at all. And there hasn't been any development at all. I haven't seen any of a development in our communities.*

*M: We can benefit if companies like Eskom are not corrupt, firstly. Secondly, we have shortage of infrastructure in our communities, let us say we want to make the green gas electricity. We want to generate electricity from green gas. We need land for that first. We need a huge storage of gas. So currently, here at [location] there is space for coal, there is someone mining beneath us. Another thing live from this because we have corruption firstly, they will take the money that is meant to build infrastructure and build infrastructure in their own homes. (Mpumalanga FGD)*

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*M9: This transition is something that I would love to see. Using what we have in order for us to get what we don't have. We have a lot of roads for instance we have N2. So can you imagine if we have two install solar systems closer to the roads, maybe it's a road that goes from Johannesburg to Durban to give an example. How much electricity are we going to have? ...They can be designed in a way where you can use the roof for the solar system. We can build houses that have the solar system roof.*

*M5: ...that I hope that the system that the government is going to introduce to us is going to prevent people from stealing electricity. This will also assist with the price of electricity not to be very high, and the units will last longer.*

*M: ...the solar panels they are going to install, they have to be strong, these are the developments. There was a time where some houses were installed with solar panels for the geysers. These panels are currently not working, and they are full of water..., they need to start by developing the available infrastructure.*

*M9: I believe in research. If I say I believe in research, I mean that I believe that every problem can be solved through research. So, can you imagine having a light produced through water because there was this time whereby there was darkness in the country, but they were able to invent light that came from electricity. What will stop them to conduct research about getting electricity using water. Can you imagine the amount of electricity that can be saved if we are innovative enough to come up with electricity that is produced through water. You, see?*

*M2: I don't see a change because I don't want this transition. I don't understand it. I'm totally against it.*

*M5: in my opinion, especially socially, we are not going to benefit. The adaptation of using new devices that will be installed to produce electricity, it's going to be very expensive...They need to think about how they are going to give incentives the community, so that they can be able to use this new service. We know that for this to be operational it's going to be costly- it will take time for the prices to go down. It's going to be costly for the communities.*

### **Receiving information on the JT**

When asked about accessible communication and information platforms on the just transition, the participants mentioned the following:

- Billboards
- Radio
- Pamphlets
- TV adverts, and the news
- Social media.
- Google and internet searches
- SMS's
- Eskom App

### **Trusting the information sources**

During the discussions, participants were asked about their level of trust in the sources they used to obtain information about the transition. Responses varied, with some expressing trust in their chosen information sources, while others expressed scepticism. Those who trust the information mentioned that they have a new administration in their municipality who give them access to the information they need and is cooperative.

Conversely, those who lacked trust in the information sources conveyed that the provided information only reflects the positive implications of the transition, omitting the negatives. This selective presentation led them to question the credibility of the information due to perceived bias. Additionally, some participants highlighted feeling uninformed and not consulted by the government and stakeholders about the transition, leaving them unable to make or give any inputs on the credibility of the information sources they engage with. Some even accused the government of purposefully withholding information so that they can avoid being challenged if the communities do not approve of the projects they are implementing.

*Facilitator: Do you trust the information you have be getting on transition, and why?*

UF: You know the thing is, they only tell us positive information, even though they have already started at other places, we don't know the side effects of such things, and they are not telling us about those. They only talk about the beauty of such things and how they will be helping us but they don't inform us that along the way, this is how it's going to affect us, maybe we will struggle with it, install new infrastructure after 5 or 10 years, they don't say that.

IV: Okay. The next question says, do you trust the information which you receive about Just Transition?

UF: If ever they come and explain to us on how they work. Eskom works with the municipality, and we don't know for now if it's going to benefit us because we don't know because when they have meetings, they don't inform us or give us the whole information as to what is happening.

UF: Yes, we will believe them when it is happening. (Free state FGD)

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UM: In [community] and [community], they would only inform NPOs around and it's not everybody who is in the NPO and when you check the NPOs, it's the very same NPOs. Information misses us at the end of the day and of which the President has signed for and we didn't participate on top of that.

Facilitator: So you are saying the companies which make money from the mines are not following the environmental rules and regulations and the heritage? You find that those companies when they have to remove the graves, they don't inform that community because they know that the community will complain. And they make sure that the information which will open your eyes is blocked so that they are able to do what they want. You are saying that the community is deliberately deprived of information so that the leaders can benefit?

UM: Yes. Like Lephalale coal mine has been closed because there are those who got graves there and there are those who were never consulted especially in terms of job opportunities. They didn't prioritise the people here and the people in that community are the first beneficiaries before anyone else. For instance, back then you could not access their social labour plan and we were fighting to see their social labour plan. But we as the community are not following these things up, we are just sitting down, even IDP, we don't attend it. I am talking about the previous administration but there is a change now. The new administration has brought new changes and we get access to most of the information. (Limpopo FGD)

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M5: I do not trust the information because sometimes you would be expecting to have load shedding at 1 o'clock and it will go at an unexpected hour. And you find that maybe at that time you were cooking something like eggs and then now they are not well cooked.

M: I don't trust the information because sometimes you will get information that you'll be load shedding and then it doesn't happen.

M4: On my site the information that I get I trust it a lot

W: Even when they say there won't be electricity and we have electricity? (Mpumalanga FGD)

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## Insights from communities that are transitioning in (TIC)

### What do communities understand?

Many participants in the focus groups expressed that they were not aware of the Just Energy Transition. Among those who were aware their understanding was also limited. In many instances, the JET was associated with a shift towards increased rooftop solar usage and viewed as a government plan to eradicate load shedding.

*W1: To my understanding we should move from coal to the sun and whatnot and whatnot. Do you understand? To me, for our community, the solar panels and whatever, it's a good thing, and again our elderly are suffering because of electricity, there's electricity debt. Now we should stick to the solar panels and so on. (Northern Cape FGD)*

*I have a small introduction into solar panels because my—a family member of mine installed his, and for me it's going to be a much—I think it's safer, and it's going to be a safe, cheaper solution for all our people in our community. (Western Cape FGD)*

### **A lack of consultations**

This lack of understanding of the transition can be attributed to most communities not being consulted. There has been a failure from the government to inform, engage and incorporate the views of communities on the JET. Communities that have some knowledge of the JET have all acquired it through secondary sources such as the internet, social media, and news outlets. The little consultation that has happened has mostly been from private companies and revolved around medium to large-scale infrastructure programmes such as the Jeffreys Bay Wind Farm. However, there is a prevalent belief among participants that consultations with the private sector are one-sided, resembling more of information-sharing sessions, as community viewpoints are not heard and subsequently remain unincorporated in decision-making.

*I wish they would tell people "These are the benefits; these are the downsides" whatever it is. But inform the people so they're aware when they decide on the process. Because to be so uninformed like us..... We don't know about the downsides. If they put it there, what happens to that natural ground? What are you doing to the plants? (Eastern Cape FGD)*

*This is actually new news to my ears. I'm only hearing about it now, but I think it's a good idea. It's a great idea. (Western Cape FGD)*

*That's the problem. You see, it was never discussed to say this is the plan, we're building the solar panels, and it takes so many years before we can transition to renewable energy. We don't actually know how long it will take and what the plan was with it (Northern Cape FGD)*

### **Eskom**

Because of the current crisis with Eskom, almost all the sessions mentioned that the transition should be responsive to the challenges of power cuts/load shedding.

*We don't really know fully the benefits of renewable energy. All that we sit with is load shedding. It's the only problem we want to talk about daily. (Northern Cape FGD)*

*There are adults in their homes who can't take the dark, who were, who know, who take pills. That's my answer. So, my answer is I don't accept the load shedding. So our government should work on that. That's my answer. (Northern Cape FGD)*

### **Equity**

Participants emphasised that A JET framework should prioritise equity to ensure that no one is left behind. Communities in the various sessions stressed that the government should not only focus on large-scale projects such as power-generating plants but should also give special attention to small-scale power generating solutions such as rooftop solar to transition away

from current systems that will soon become obsolete. For example, the government can provide partial and full subsidies to low to middle-income communities unable to afford rooftop solar. Furthermore, the same equity of involving all sections of society must be applied in the dissemination of information and carrying out consultations around the transition.

*Everyone must benefit from it, rich and poor. There must be equality. (Western Cape FGD)*

*My take on the reason why I believe it's taking so long for the transition is since—lack of knowledge. Not a lot of people know about the transition. And then also, affordability can be also an issue whereby everybody cannot afford just to go from this way of obtaining electricity to solar because solar is very expensive. And then government fails to implement policies whereby they could maybe assist the less fortunate in acquiring those new technology which they need to enable them to have electricity all the time. So, I believe it's all about the accessibility, the affordability, and the knowledge and the know-how that's not being made transparent to the people. (Western Cape)*

## **Job creation and upskilling**

Communities are particularly interested in the potential job creation possibilities that can come with some of the developments outlined in the JET framework, however, there is an acknowledgement that the government and other stakeholders would have to upskill community members to ensure that they are competent to respond to such opportunities when they arise. There is a firm belief from the participants that the JET can potentially 'spark a new industrial revolution' for South Africa if done well.

*It has to be just. Because [as] you said, we cannot just switch off electricity, close Eskom's plants, and then those hundreds of thousands of people lose their jobs. And then we just suddenly wake up one day and we are all using solar. It doesn't work like that. It's a more complicated thing. That is why it has to be just. (Northern Cape FGD)*

*...being able for us local companies to be empowered by training to be manufacturers to manufacture solar panels, and even to be installers of it so that we as South Africans can now proudly manufacture, install, and reap the benefits of it... (Western Cape FGD)*

## **Fears**

Due to the lack of consultations that have characterised South Africa's JET framework in the sampled communities, there are some fears that participants have identified about some of the large-scale projects that have been earmarked for development in their areas. The first one is that some of the participants are fearful that they might lose control and access to their ancestral land that holds cultural, religious, and traditional meanings.

*... will not be good to come and build a plant on somebody's site where they do ceremonies or keep religious festivals year in, year out if it's been done for generations, and now all of a sudden big corporations come because of money, and now wanting to implement it on the people. So, we also need to try and preserve in whatever transition we do, to try and preserve our natural heritage and culture which we inherit from our ancestors. (Northern Cape FGD)*

*We were told about a nuclear plant that will be built on land that was bought by Eskom, but the one regarding the sea we were told that if any damage happens there is nothing that comes from the sea that will be edible which is the disadvantage, however, we were told that the advantage is that there would be more job opportunities when there is a nuclear plant. (Eastern Cape FGD)*

Participants also spoke extensively about their fears that if the transition is not handled properly and people are not upskilled, there is a risk that the framework will exacerbate the country's already overwhelming unemployment crisis.

There are fears that the JET framework is used by those in power as a bargaining tool to leverage resources and public sympathy for their political ambitions.

Also, in the Northern Cape, participants fear that the development of new large-scale infrastructure in the province will exacerbate the supply of basic services such as water in an already water-scarce region- this is mainly due to the perception that the Green Hydrogen Projects proposed for the Boegoebaai area will consume a lot of the freshwater leaving citizens to battle with big corporations and the country's energy needs for the valuable resource. Lastly, residents in the Northern Cape expressed that they fear that the solar projects that are happening in their areas will make the already hot region's temperatures to rise.

*I feel the sun is getting warmer. The desert is getting drier. Everything has a consequence. The solar we're using—last year it only reached forty-five degrees this year it's reaching fifty degrees. That's the downside. (Northern Cape FGD)*

### **Corruption and the economy**

In sessions in which participants are informed about the transition, discussions often revealed a lack of trust in the government's ability to effectively implement plans due to concerns about corruption and a perceived lack of political will. Furthermore, there are fears that the allocated funds for JET may be misappropriated or stolen, potentially leading the government into a borrowing spree, which could further exacerbate the country's economic woes.

In a separate session, participants raised that the JET framework will not benefit developing countries like South Africa. This scepticism is fuelled by the lack of commitment demonstrated by certain developed nations to the Paris Agreement, citing the USA's withdrawal between 2017 and 2020 as a prominent example.

*Facilitator: "What do you think is needed for the transition to be just or fair for the community? Just means fair and square. Nobody is left behind. Nobody is impaired. So, we have it, and I'll ask the question again. What do you think is needed for the transition to be just or fair for the community? What can we put in place?"*

*F1: Corruption must stop but it will never. (Northern Cape)*

### **Communication**

In nearly all the sessions, participants recommended social media as the most accessible and preferred mode of communication due to its reach across diverse age groups and geographical locations. Furthermore, participants also recommended the use of traditional broad-based communication initiatives encompassing community events such as talks in schools, community workshops, and town halls; mass media including local radio and TV. as well as information, education and communication materials posters, brochures, and other printed materials.

*M2: I think it would be better if at least the government comes to explain his plans to us before he executes them so that we can see what will actually happen. (Eastern Cape FGD)*

*W9: I think they should do the way they did it initially by calling a community meeting at the hall and explain right there that they will do a certain thing and explain what the dangers of that thing are this and that so that we know when to say no. There should also plug posters in shops, people going to the shop will read and know that there is something happening at the hall. (Eastern Cape FGD)*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a significant number of participants from the TIC and TOC communities voiced their frustration with the ongoing power challenges in their communities. Across all focus groups, many participants mentioned that they were not aware of the government's plans, as outlined in the JET framework to shift towards sustainable, renewable energy sources electricity generation and phase out coal. For those who were aware, they acknowledged the necessity to decarbonise and prioritise renewable energy, however, they were unsure how these new plans would impact their communities' stability in terms of livelihoods, and the country's overall economic outlook.

For participants, coal is a major factor in their lives and life would change drastically without it. They highlighted its affordability, and its use for heating and cooking during power cuts. Moreover, they have adapted their lives to survive without electricity, by relying on coal. Additionally, access to coal has provided them with a reliable source of energy and allows them to provide for their families across employment sectors. Coal is essentially their only trusted source of energy.

Participants in the TIC focus groups, expressed that they had limited understandings of the just transition policy framework, but they understood that it is about reducing loadshedding shedding. In both TOC and TIC, participants expressed a strong desire to be actively involved and consulted on the energy transition to ensure that their rights are upheld and to gain knowledge about potential opportunities that could secure their livelihoods and that of their communities. Further, they acknowledged that the transition would contribute towards reducing air pollution, mitigating climate change, and improving the health of communities by reducing pollution. Thus, communities emphasised the necessity for the government and stakeholders to keep them informed and engaged throughout the transition to greener energy. Through such involvement, they hope to be empowered, have their concerns addressed, and gain confidence that the transition will not only benefit them, but also the entire nation.