



# South African Cities Dialogue

## Building City Resilience through a Just and Equitable Transition

Outcomes Report | Executive Summary

**C40  
CITIES**



**8 SALGA**  
SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION  
Inspiring service delivery

## Urban Just Transitions: Addressing Climate and Social Challenges Globally, Nationally, and Locally

**As the closest government to residents with a unique understanding of local dynamics, cities and municipalities are pivotal in implementing a just transition. They have the authority over key climate sectors, the ability to convene partners in social dialogue and the capacity to drive green jobs and adapt cities to increase resilience and create thriving communities. Urban just transitions transform high-level strategies and academic concepts into tangible actions with real benefits for residents.**



South African cities and municipalities exemplify locally and stakeholder-led just transitions, demonstrating commitment and leadership in improving and scaling their solutions.

From pioneering social dialogues in Ekurhuleni to prioritising green employment for youth in Johannesburg and for disadvantaged communities in Cape Town, to innovative and equitable climate disaster response and preparedness in eThekweni, cities and municipalities turn abstract concepts into tangible outcomes with a strong appetite to act faster and fairer.

This outcomes report provides a high-level overview of the findings from the South African Cities Dialogue on Building City Resilience Through a Just and Equitable Transition, convened by C40 Cities, the Presidential Climate Commission, and the South African Local Government Association in Johannesburg in March 2024.

The dialogue served as a valuable platform for meaningful discussions and the exchange of best practices among local government representatives, organising partners, civil society, youth and the private sector.

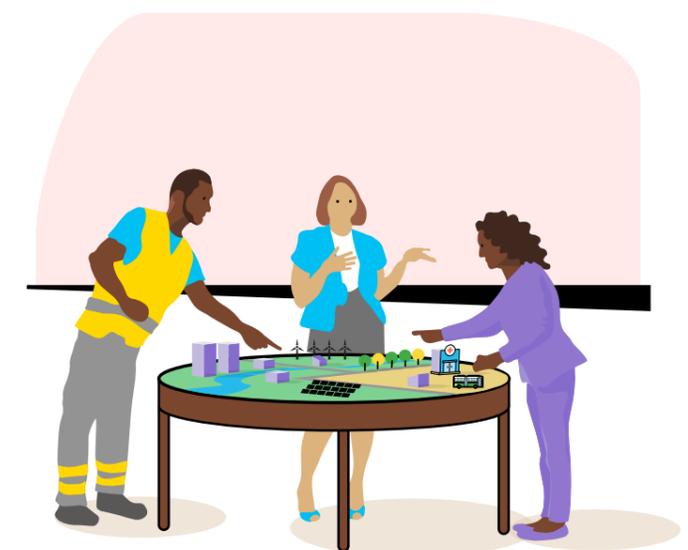


Illustrations: Tom Hampson

The summary report captures key takeaways, including:

- **Collaboration:** Participants recognised the need for strengthened and more coordinated collaboration across all levels of government, unions, affected communities, workers, and civil society.
- **Governance and Policy Coherence:** Non-siloed ways of working and inclusive governance mechanisms that involve cities, local, regional and national governments are essential. Policies must be coherent and aligned to consider the important local context of a just transition to prevent entrenching inequalities.
- **Social Dialogue and Community Engagement:** Just transition should be rooted in social dialogue and engagement to help design and implement policies and actions that are effective, inclusive and just. Ensuring equitable benefits through climate action can contribute to rectifying these injustices.

- **Catalysing Good, Green Jobs:** Cities and municipalities serve as green job and skills hubs, helping to reduce unemployment and skills gaps, particularly for youth, women, and marginalised groups.
- **Just Transition for Climate Resilience:** Just transition approaches are key not only for mitigation but also in addressing the exacerbated impacts of extreme climate events and loss and damage.
- **Gaining Public Support:** It's important to provide residents with clear information about how the necessary upfront investment in a just transition outweighs the cost of inaction and mitigate valid fears about the negative impacts of transition and climate action through co-creation and awareness-raising.
- **Financing a Just Transition:** Cities and municipalities have the know-how, the strategies, and the partnerships to drive progress. What they need are the resources to accelerate their efforts.



## Recommendations

The report outlines key recommendations for city decision-makers, national governments, international organisations, and finance institutions to unlock the potential of local governments to deliver a just transition, including:

National governments  
Local and international organisations  
Cities and municipalities

**Continue to strengthen engagement, consultation and partnership with municipalities and mayors in National Just Transition processes.**

Despite the growing recognition of the role of local governments in Just Transition processes, there is a need to strengthen collaboration with the national government as well as between local governments and other levels of governance.

**This can be achieved by:**

- Involving a wider set of municipal actors in regular and coordinated consultations regarding national just transition policies, implementation and finance.
- Working towards replicating Ekurhuleni's social dialogues and Just Transition Commission in other municipalities to elevate local transition needs to the national level.



## Recommendations

National governments  
Local and international organisations  
Cities and municipalities  
Businesses  
Civil society

**Raise awareness for the recognition of the urban dimension of a just transition nationally, regionally and in multilateral processes.**

As the closest level of government to communities, municipalities are taking the lead in integrating equity, just transition, and resilience into climate plans and strategies, prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable. They leverage their authority over key sectors and employ soft power where they lack formal mandates. If the efforts of local governments were formally recognised and supported by the national government and other key stakeholders, they could achieve even more in these areas.

**This can be achieved by:**

- Enhancing the urban aspect of a just transition in South African Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, amongst others. This involves bolstering just transition principles, processes, and financing, and including concrete implementation measures to boost equitable climate action.
- Advocating for the inclusion of local governments and community perspectives in just transition processes at the international level (e.g. NDCs, Just Transition Work Programme, Just Transition Energy Partnerships).
- Showcasing tangible, locally-led just transition actions, such as creating good, green jobs

and building climate resilience, to diverse audiences—including national governments, funders, and the general public—while elevating examples of just transition in South African municipalities in global processes and discussions to demonstrate how and why municipalities are key to achieving a just transition is crucial.

National governments  
Local and international organisations  
Cities and municipalities  
Businesses  
Civil society

**Accelerating municipal action to drive the creation of good, green jobs is essential to a just transition.**

Cities and municipalities take ambitious steps to accelerate climate action while creating well-paid and accessible green jobs. Maximising their potential for creating jobs through climate action initiatives in tandem with social justice is critical to the national vision of a just transition.

**This can be achieved by:**

- Prioritising the creation of accessible green jobs for youth, in collaboration with the private sector and civil society to reduce young people's unemployment levels and improve livelihoods.
- Defining a common good, green jobs definition and establishing a robust and uniform monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework across South African municipalities, ensuring diverse perspectives.
- Integrating the 'good green jobs' lens and equity into municipal procurement to stimulate the local economy and to ensure accessibility.

National governments

Local and international organisations

Cities and municipalities

Finance institutions

**Equip municipalities with the technical capacity and data to accelerate the implementation of just transition and resilience-building initiatives to further the implementation of the [Just Transition Framework](#).**

Insufficient local resources and/or the lack of trained municipal staff can significantly hinder the implementation of the national just transition vision. Additionally, cities and municipalities experience gaps in data crucial for applying for funding that supports the most vulnerable populations and for setting up efficient and inclusive strategies.

**This can be achieved by:**

- Creating shared platforms for providing information, including specific guiding documents tailored to urban contexts and establishing working groups or networks for the purpose of facilitating continued exchange and mutual learning.
- Investing, with budget allocation across all government levels, in capacity building and skills development at the municipal level for effective implementation of the just transition agenda.
- Enhancing access to qualitative and quantitative intersectional data for cities and municipalities to bolster resilience

efforts, address losses and damages, and foster equitable workforces. Prioritise gathering data from informal settlements and sectors often overlooked in formal censuses.

National governments

Finance institutions

Funders

**Significantly increase funding and access to climate finance for local governments for a just transition and resilience-building.**

Aligning financing pathways with just transition principles ensures investments and climate actions address inequities, support resilience-building and anticipate and minimise potential negative effects of the transition.

**This can be achieved by:**

- Establishing common principles and metrics for just transition finance including clarity on what constitutes just transition finance will help to guide investors, accelerate investments on international, national and local levels, and enable measuring progress towards a just transition for all.
- Developing tailored financial strategies for cities and municipalities to address their diverse financial needs in facilitating just transitions and additionally support project pipeline creation.

