



Introducing a Feminist Just Transition for Scotland

This discussion paper has been produced by freelance researcher Beth Cloughton for the Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG). It is produced as an ongoing piece of thinking for the SWBG with the aim of contributing to public debate and discussion on the theme of a feminist just transition. SWBG welcomes feedback and comment to support development of work across this theme.

Earlier this year, The Guardian released an article titled 'There's no greater feminist cause than the climate fight'¹ (Bhutto, 2023). Awareness of the relationship between gender inequality and climate injustice has entered mainstream news². Heightened sensitivities around the interconnection of two of the world's most pressing problems provides a key opportunity for Scotland to deepen, quicken, and remedy current Just Transition responses and actions, through the lens of a Feminist Just Transition (FJT).

The climate crisis is the consequence of ongoing socioeconomic inequality and injustice³. The increase of CO2 emissions is directly related to social inequality⁴. Greater gender equity produces lower environmental impacts⁵. A Feminist Just Transition amplifies the transformational quality to Transitions. As such, any Just Transition approach needs to urgently address issues with an intersectional approach.

It is an urgent and necessary task to disentangle a firmly rooted socioeconomic system, which has and continues to depend on slave labour, women's labour, and nature as expected gifts in the pursuit and accumulation of capital. A FJT challenges deeply rooted power and stereotyped understandings of what it means to be 'strong'⁶⁷ which has become synonymous with traditionally masculinist notions of extraction. It is unsurprising then, that approaches centred

around care, interdependence, and cooperation have been subjugated due to a 'naturalised' association to femininity⁸⁹¹⁰.

What is the Just Transition?

Despite no universally agreed definition¹¹, beyond a principle, process, and practice¹², the Just Transition broadly refers to a movement beginning within Trade Unions and labour organisations to transition workers away from environmentally destructive jobs¹³. Largely focusing on supported transitions away from polluting industry to other forms of employment, alternate Just Transition approaches argue for action on broader inequalities through climate or environmental justice¹⁴. In this latter conceptualisation, the Just Transition's movement towards a low- or zero-carbon economy is related to how environmental injustices impact in varied ways marginalised groups across the world.

The Just Transition can be categorised into four approaches¹⁵: status quo (no modification of the current socioeconomic system); managerial (alter rules within the existing system); structural (use distributional justice mechanisms to alter the system); and transformative (overhaul the current system)¹⁶.

The transformative approach makes for the most promising Just Transition¹⁷, particularly when feminist¹⁸¹⁹. However, current iterations of Just Transitions in Scotland contain many internal contradictions, like purporting the pursuit of traditional economic growth is cohesive with socioenvironmental protection and abundance²⁰. The latest National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022)²¹ contends that by 2030 Scotland will be 'an international benchmark for how an economy can transform itself'²² whilst also a 'magnet for...investment and global private capital'²³. Furthermore, despite the introduction of a ministerial working group (2019) on policy coherence for sustainable development²⁴, policy continues to be inconsistent: ongoing Just Transition actions whilst approving two 'green' freeports²⁵, continued exports of oil, gas, and economic support of the arms industry²⁶²⁷.

Scottish Government pledged to be net zero five years ahead of the UK Government's mandated (though meagre²⁸) 2050. But, the Paris Agreement (2015), indicating countries must take concerted climate action to prevent reaching the 1.5 degrees increase in temperature, is likely to be exceeded in the next five years²⁹. There is now a 50:50 chance of average temperatures exceeding 1.5c by 2026³⁰³¹. In everyday terms, this will undoubtedly negatively impact the most marginalised (who contribute(d) least to the crisis³²³³) to respond to the upcoming weather volatility, amongst other stressors, with existing energy crises already having devastating consequences³⁴.

There is evidence of investment from Scottish Government to tackle different aspects of the Just Transition, yet what is more evident is a significant lack of linking up conceptually and practically the interlocking nature of the climate crisis and gender inequality. Plus, the reality that Local Authorities are facing huge budget constraints and are therefore unable to adequately fund local-led action on either problem.

What is a Feminist Just Transition?

Climate justice is a global feminist concern, which plays out differently across contexts and demographics³⁵. Gender inequality is a global climate concern. As one intensifies, so does the other, like the consequences of climate change exacerbating violence against women and girls³⁶.

Despite the 2023 International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issuing a 'final warning' for humanity³⁷, continuing to address interconnected global problems in separate silos, and as isolated issues aggravates the problem and impairs genuine, just change. A FJT as an intersectional, gender competent, and decolonial approach can implement holistic change.

Two major vectors of the Feminist Just Transition are social and physical infrastructural changes³⁸. A FJT adjusts how care is socially understood, performed, waged, and included in the broader economy. Emphasising social infrastructural change and investment promotes an ethic of care as an approach³⁹, which feeds into how physical infrastructure can be reconsidered as a common good as opposed to private capital assets to accumulate.

A FJT in Scotland?

Scotland has a varied landscape of campaigning for gender equality⁴⁰⁴¹⁴²⁴³ and for climate justice⁴⁴⁴⁵⁴⁶. However, the two have not yet rigorously come together. A Feminist Just Transition amplifies how the climate crisis is not equally felt⁴⁷, nor equally produced. Any response, mitigation, or adaptation approach must be cognisant to demographic intersections and how approaches can either entrench or remedy existing inequities, for instance, women and girls are disproportionately impacted by poverty⁴⁸ worldwide, which reduces resilience to climate change. The current prioritisation on physical infrastructure transitions (e.g., Green New Jobs⁴⁹) in their current conceptualisation is likely to replicate existing social inequities, with women losing out due to already being under-represented in carbon-intensive industries.

Scotland is primed in both its devolved powers and recent positioning as a wellbeing economy⁵⁰⁵¹⁵² to spearhead a Feminist Just Transition. However, there has been minimal domestic recognition of the link between gender equality and climate justice.

To understand what a FJT looks like for Scotland domestically, it is useful to draw on existing work by the UK Women's Budget Group (WBG)⁵³, and their partnership with the Women's Environmental Network (WEN)⁵⁴. Together, they have produced the Feminist Green New Deal (FGND), approaching the green economy movement intersectionally and working to platform voices of marginalised people in environmental debate and policymaking. FGND project recently published their latest report 'A green and caring economy'⁵⁵ (GCE) (2022), which frames current climatic and gender inequality a result of carelessly pursuing profit, generating exploitation of planet and people. The report highlights that care needs to be centrefold in Just Transition approaches, as a form of legitimate and well-paid labour, and an arena to remedy existing gender inequality⁵⁶.

A FJT addresses the necessary broader socioeconomic dimensions required to radically shift Scotland to simultaneously net zero and gender equality. This is done by focusing across scales, both domestically and in Scotland's role globally, towards human-rights based equity, as opposed

to simply replicating inequitable and vulnerable systems of power that created the current overlapping crises of gender inequality and climate injustice.

A FJT calls for structural (e.g., production, consumption, and access to infrastructure) and social (division of labour, recognition of work, recognition of care, gender pay-gaps, etc.) change⁵⁷⁵⁸⁵⁹. In addition, a FJT calls on Scottish Government to deliver the transition with speed. A failure to tackle the climate crisis is a direct contradiction to commitments to advance gender equality – Scottish Government must address the interlocking systems of climate injustice and gender injustice.

There is no report, policy, or strategy that explicitly discusses a Feminist Just Transition and limited engagement with proponents of a FJT overall. However, enacting a Feminist Just Transition can take inspiration from existing feminist approaches in Scottish Government, specifically in their work on Feminist Foreign Policy⁶⁰. This chimes with the goal of a feminist approach to a Just Transition which is beyond borders and connects policy domestically and internationally, with groups that have been at the losing end of the current system⁶¹.

Scottish Government has declared its support and financed moves towards gender-just climate action⁶². For instance, Scottish Government's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO) helped the government adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy approach⁶³, and took a leading role in establishing Gender Equality and Climate Change in the Glasgow Women's Leadership Statement⁶⁴. These are necessary commitments by a western government, which has historically benefitted from colonial powers, to provide reparative compensation and proportionate responsibility to the global majority⁶⁵ particularly women. However, domestic policy does not similarly link gender equality and just transition or climate change plans.

Scottish Government must adopt an iterative policy approach that goes between the level of domestic and global to enact a Feminist Just Transition. The purpose of transitioning domestically is not just for the people of Scotland but about the potential impact internationally. The power of UK and Scottish policy on global majority women cannot be overlooked, but with Scotland's

partnerships with Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo)⁶⁶ and Just Transition Global Partnership⁶⁷, the move to a Feminist Just Transition is obvious and primed.

Funding a FJT

While greenhouse gas pollution is at base an ecological imbalance, in neoliberal society it is typically presented and understood as a security issue and a scientific problem to be addressed via “masculine” technological options...or market-based responses. Market based policies often further marginalize women by failing to include them in the development of climate solutions.

(Hathaway, 2020:16)

Sometimes when a system is called into question, a system whose power is undeniable, it is often met with disbelief that there is any other way, that funding another way of life is idealistic and utopian. However, it is more costly, ecologically, socially, and financially to continue pursuing inequitable, untapped profit as the core and ultimate goal.

Simply transitioning or creating jobs (e.g., Green New Deals⁶⁸ [GND]) in existing male-dominated industries does not address inequalities beyond jobs for people (men) who already have jobs in high-polluting industry. GNDs, related Green New Jobs (GNJ) and broader Just Transition mechanisms are not yet enacting transformative policy about the gendered aspects to its delivery.

Scottish Women’s Budget Group (SWBG) notes in their pre-budget briefing⁶⁹ (2022) that the delivery of a gender-transformative budget means transitioning high polluting, male dominated industries of transport, energy and construction and **simultaneously** investing in the already low-carbon, labour intensive, women dominated caring and service industries. Investing in the care economy and broader social infrastructure is a critical economic strategy to promote a Feminist Just Transition that simultaneously addresses women’s inequality and ecological injustice.

The (paid) care economy is a low-carbon sector and the current approach to GND and GNJ overlooks women and re-entrenches gender inequalities. The latest OECD report shows that 71%

of GNJ are held by men⁷⁰ and already existing low carbon jobs held mainly by women. In Scotland, 72.2% of men are represented in green jobs⁷¹. The WBG showed how investment in the care sector could create 2.7 times as many jobs as the same investment in construction and produce 30% less greenhouse gas emissions⁷²⁷³. WBG also shared that social infrastructure jobs are already green jobs: the average job in health and care produces nearly 1,500 times less greenhouse gas than a job in oil and gas⁷⁴.

Women-dominated industries in the UK are healthcare (78% of jobs held by women), social work (78%), social care (82%), childcare (90%), education (70%), and retail⁷⁵. Women are disproportionately represented by low-income, part-time work⁷⁶ which is paid less, as part-time work is paid at a lower rate than full-time employment⁷⁷. This discrepancy is related to the way care is framed, valued and undertaken.

As women are the shock absorbers of crises⁷⁸⁷⁹, the financial impact and funds needed are not clear (also because of a lack of gender-competent analysis and evaluation within monitors like the National Performance Framework, a tool used to assess Scotland's progress against the Sustainable Development Goals, has no gender-specific indicators). When public services and social infrastructure is underfunded, women fill in the rolling back of Governmental support, which contributes to entrenching gender inequality and climate crisis.

Evidently, Just Transition-related financing currently overlooks women. Programmes of Just Transitions that narrowly focus on fossil fuel workers exacerbate existing inequalities⁸⁰. This was seen in the 1980's and 90's wave of unemployment in former coal industries in the UK, which were gendered and generated displacement, double-duties, and disruption⁸¹⁸². Such 'poorly managed transitions in the coal sector in the 1980s led to entrenched inequalities in those regions decades on'⁸³⁸⁴⁸⁵.

There is an urgent need for Scottish Government to take a whole economy approach, centring social infrastructure. Clearly, there is much at risk in terms of gender equality and the movement towards a Just Transition- without considering care infrastructure, Scotland merely repeats history. Just Transition solutions rooted in market-based mechanisms rely on underpaid and

under-waged labour from marginalised groups in the UK (Diski, 2022) and worldwide. Crucially, “...market-based mechanisms have completely failed to cut carbon emissions”⁸⁶⁸⁷⁸⁸.

A feminist perspective on public ownership considers care infrastructure as public good and something to be publicly financed as a sustainable mechanism for supporting infrastructure via national utilities. Priority of high-quality services would supersede maximisation of profit which is the goal in the current market system remains in the social infrastructure system⁸⁹ as opposed to private asset managers and shareholders. Climate and gender just routes to raising money for a FJT can be done through creating publicly owned goods. The latest report by Common Wealth (2022)⁹⁰ showed how a publicly owned electricity generation firm could save Britain nearly £21bn a year. The director of Common Wealth noted that ‘...rebuilding our energy system around the public interest...is the fastest, fairest, most effective way to build a clean, secure, affordable power system.’⁹¹

Another funding opportunity for a FJT is around progressive taxation and redistribution. Stop Climate Chaos Scotland (SCCS) has produced several papers on taxing for Climate Justice⁹²⁹³. Most recently ‘Financing Climate Justice’ (2022)⁹⁴ provides detailed analysis of how Scottish Government can progressively fund the Just Transition. Some reference is made to gender equality (pp54 and pp96) though it mainly centres around public transport. As new approaches to tax are adopted a gendered lens needs to be included in the planning process as part of work on equality impact assessments to ensure the new financing measures work both for climate justice and to tackle inequalities.

Scottish Government must reorder the domestic and global economy around climate justice, gender equality and decoloniality⁹⁵. This can be done via several channels like debt relief – something that Scotland is doing via the Nationally Determined Contribution⁹⁶, as well as gender-competent climate financing and eradication of tax havens and ending exploitative treaties. A FJT is not bound by borders, but a global approach.

Furthermore, Scottish Government must provide continuous evaluation about how domestic climate and gender policy affects global majority women to avoid a myopic approach. Rather, all policy must consider its impact domestically and globally to prevent replicating and intensifying

existing colonialist frameworks. Scotland's targets are largely about domestic emissions, which is less⁹⁷ than half of Scotland's total emissions⁹⁸. In Scotland's Circular Economy Bill^[99] and other Just Transition-related policy, there is no explicit connection to gender equality either.

The Just Transition must consider how domestic policy in the move towards net zero impacts on the most marginalised worldwide, particularly women. Batteries for electric cars, a proposed solution, require mining of high-value minerals⁹⁹¹⁰⁰ which devastates social and ecological landscapes of global majorities. Applying a feminist lens reveals any unintended consequences of policy decisions before these materialise, therefore ensuring the Just Transition is based on principles of fairness and accountability working towards achieving gender equality globally.

Conclusion

Transforming the domestic and global economy means realising that the economic system that has created the ecological crisis has also created gender and racial inequalities. In turn, any response requires an ambitious, feminist, and transformational Just Transition to remedy.

Critically, there are international implications of Scotland's insufficiently fast climate action.

In 2023, Scotland has missed 7 out of the 11 climate targets¹⁰¹. Each missed target means Scotland has generated more climate damage than agreed by law, which disproportionately impacts women domestically and globally. The UKCCC says Scottish Government targets are becoming meaningless¹⁰². For the transition to a sustainable economy to be at all Just or Feminist, it must be significantly faster- without any rapidity the climate crisis will continue to hamper progress towards gender equality and ecological sustainability.

Addressing the climate crisis therefore requires an intersectional approach. The climate crisis demands governments worldwide to immediately develop, enact urgently, and properly evaluate transformative policy. A FJT highlights the speed at which change needs to happen, which is currently quicker and more ambitious than existing approaches.

A Feminist Just Transition in Scotland is an intersectional and transformational approach to build a sustainable, green and caring economy, which prioritises care for people and planet. Working to build equality of women and marginalised groups domestically and globally, a FJT elevates the agency of the marginalised, disrupts and eviscerates patriarchal and colonial power structures, is accountable, transparent, and timely, allocating significant resources to achieve the equity-based vision.

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End Notes

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- ⁴⁹ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/what-we-do/skills-planning/climate-emergency-skills-action-plan-implementation-plan/green-jobs-in-scotland/>
- ⁵⁰ Scotland is one of only five countries who are part of the Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo). This is a collaboration of national and regional governments sharing policy practices to build wellbeing economies.
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