

Policy brief

Nigeria's Just Transition: Climate Ambition, Labour Agency, and Uneven Participation

Climate Ambition under Fossil-Fuel Dependence

Few countries embody the contradictions of just transition more sharply than Nigeria. The country's increasingly ambitious climate commitments and emerging cleaner-energy initiatives coexist with crude oil and other petroleum products accounting for 85% of total export value in early 2026, the enduring effects of a long history of fuel subsidies, and everyday systems of work, mobility, and livelihoods that remain deeply tied to fossil fuels.

Over the past decade, Nigeria has built an increasingly ambitious climate policy framework. Its first Nationally Determined Contribution, published in 2015, targeted emissions reductions of 20% unconditionally and up to 45% with international support by 2030. The revised NDC, published in 2021, increased the conditional target to 47%. In the same year, Nigeria announced its net-zero-by-2060 ambition and passed what is widely regarded as West Africa's first standalone comprehensive

climate change law. This was followed in 2022 by the launch of Africa's first Energy Transition Plan. NDC 3.0, published in 2025, raises Nigeria's ambition further by setting economy-wide emissions targets for 2030 and 2035, while giving greater priority to just transition, adaptation and delivery.

These frameworks mark important progress. The Climate Change Act created the National Council on Climate Change and a Climate Change Fund, while the Energy

Brief:

This brief examines how labour unions have engaged with climate policy and just transition debates in Nigeria, and sets out recommendations for strengthening worker-centred transition planning. It focuses on Nigeria's emerging just transition architecture, organised labour's climate advocacy, and lessons from compressed natural gas (CNG) and electric vehicle deployment in Borno State after the 2023 fuel subsidy removal policy of the President Bola Tinubu-led federal government. The recommendations draw on findings from the multi-year research project "Just Transitions – a Global Exploration", based at Leeds University Business School and funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation.

Content:

- Climate ambition under fossil-fuel dependence
- Labour unions and Nigeria's emerging just transition agenda
- Borno State: cleaner transport and the limits of centralised consultation
- Policy recommendations for labour unions and governments

Evidence base:

Analysis of 29 semi-structured interviews with national and subnational labour union leaders, policymakers, climate experts, and public administrators in Nigeria, alongside desk research and examination of climate policy documents, union strategy papers, legislation, and media sources.

Transition Plan seeks to tackle energy poverty, expand clean energy access, **and create an estimated 340,000 jobs by 2030 and 840,000 by 2060.** More recent instruments, including the Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategy and the NDC Implementation Framework, further integrate just transition principles by emphasising economic support,

job retraining, social protection, and stakeholder engagement involving government, unions, industry, and civil society.

In the light of a very vibrant climate ambition, the challenge is whether Nigeria can translate a largely state-driven policy architecture into an inclusive transition process shaped by workers, affected communities,

and subnational actors. The 2023 removal of fuel subsidies exposed this challenge sharply: it intensified economic hardship while accelerating interest in cleaner transport alternatives, including CNG and electric vehicles. Nigeria's just transition will depend on climate targets and technologies, as well as inclusive, decentralised, and worker-centred social dialogue.



Organised labour has become increasingly active in Nigeria's climate governance landscape, but engagement remains uneven across unions, sectors, and governance levels. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has emerged as the most visible labour actor in this space, with a more structured climate agenda than the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Its 2015 Climate Change Policy helped expand labour awareness of climate change and supported the creation of climate change desks across more than 40 affiliate unions.

For unions, just transition is primarily understood through the language of decent work, job protection, social protection, and rights. Union

officials frame transition as a process that must protect workers and communities affected by shifts away from carbon-intensive sectors. This worker-centred framing makes labour representation central to transition planning.

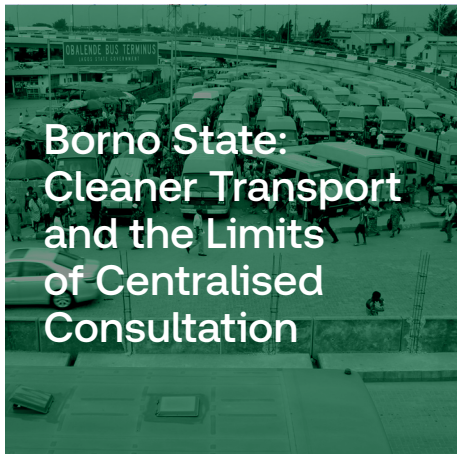
The NLC has become more active in national and international climate policy. Labour representatives contributed to the just transition section of Nigeria's 2021 NDC, while the NLC later produced an NDC position paper, training curriculum, policy briefs and a Workers' Charter of Demands. NDC 3.0 reflects several of these priorities, including social dialogue, worker protection, reskilling and social protection. Nigerian unions have also become more visible in COP processes and climate justice advocacy.

Energy-sector unions have shown especially strong engagement. The National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) have increasingly incorporated energy transition into member education. **A coalition of NLC-affiliated energy unions also**

published a Workers' Charter of Demands on Just Transition in 2025, calling for decent work, social protection, workers' rights, job security, and gender mainstreaming.

However, labour participation remains fragmented. National-level unions and energy-sector unions are more engaged than state councils and transport-sector unions, even though many transition policies are implemented locally and directly affect sectoral union workers, such as transport workers. Interview evidence shows that most state union chapters lack structured engagement with climate policy and have limited collaboration with state governments on climate-related issues.

The implications of these gaps are clearest at the subnational level, where transition policies are implemented and workers experience their direct effects. The case of Borno State shows how Nigeria's just transition can move from national ambition to local experimentation, but also how centralised consultation can weaken worker inclusion.



Borno State: Cleaner Transport and the Limits of Centralised Consultation

Borno, the farthest state in Nigeria's north-east geopolitical zone, provides a useful test case for Nigeria's emerging just transition agenda. The state faces overlapping pressures of conflict, displacement, climate vulnerability, and economic hardship. Following the 2023 removal of fuel subsidies, rising transport costs became an immediate concern for workers and residents, prompting labour unions to press state authorities for measures to cushion the impact.

In response, the Borno State government introduced CNG buses and electric taxis as part of a broader effort to reduce transport costs and expand cleaner mobility options. This was significant for two reasons. First, it showed how economic crisis can accelerate practical transition measures, even where climate policy is not the initial driver. Second, it demonstrated that subnational governments can translate national transition ambitions into visible local action.

However, the Borno case also exposes a central weakness in Nigeria's just transition architecture. Although umbrella unions such as the NLC and TUC were involved in advocacy and consultation, transport-sector unions whose members were most directly affected by changes in the transport economy were not meaningfully included in policy design. Drivers,

operators, and informal transport workers face immediate risks from cleaner transport reforms, including income disruption, changing skills requirements, and uncertainty over access to new opportunities.

Borno therefore illustrates both the promise and risk of Nigeria's transition pathway. Cleaner transport initiatives can support affordability, reduce dependence on petrol, and create new employment possibilities. But without early and direct engagement with affected workers, they can also reproduce procedural injustice. Thus, just transition in Nigeria will depend on deploying new technologies, and on building consultation processes that include the workers and communities most exposed to transition risks.



Recommendations

1. For labour unions

- Expand sectoral ownership of just transition discussions: Just transition efforts by the NLC and TUC would benefit from devolving more climate engagement and capacity-building resources to relevant sectoral unions, such as

NURTW and RTEAN. Including relevant sectoral unions more directly in NDC, Energy Transition Plan, and cleaner transport discussions would help ensure that reskilling, social protection, and job-security measures respond better and more fittingly to the realities of affected workers.

- Strengthen subnational just transition capacity: National unions' engagement should deepen collaboration between national structures, state councils, and local affiliates to build wider awareness and ownership of just transition issues. Supporting state councils with training, briefing materials, and negotiation tools can help them engage more effectively

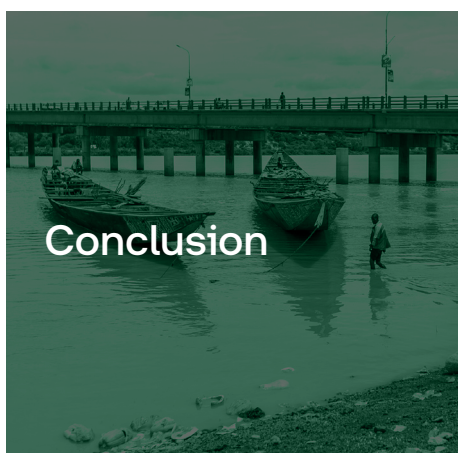
with state governments on climate and transition policies. Expanding climate engagement beyond Abuja-based policy spaces would improve local responsiveness and ownership, and strengthen labour participation in state-level transition governance.

- **Establish a coordinated labour platform for transition negotiations:** The NLC, TUC and relevant sectoral unions should develop a common framework for engagement with government on just transition policy. This should identify agreed minimum demands on decent work, retraining, income protection, job security and procedural fairness, while allowing sector-specific concerns to be

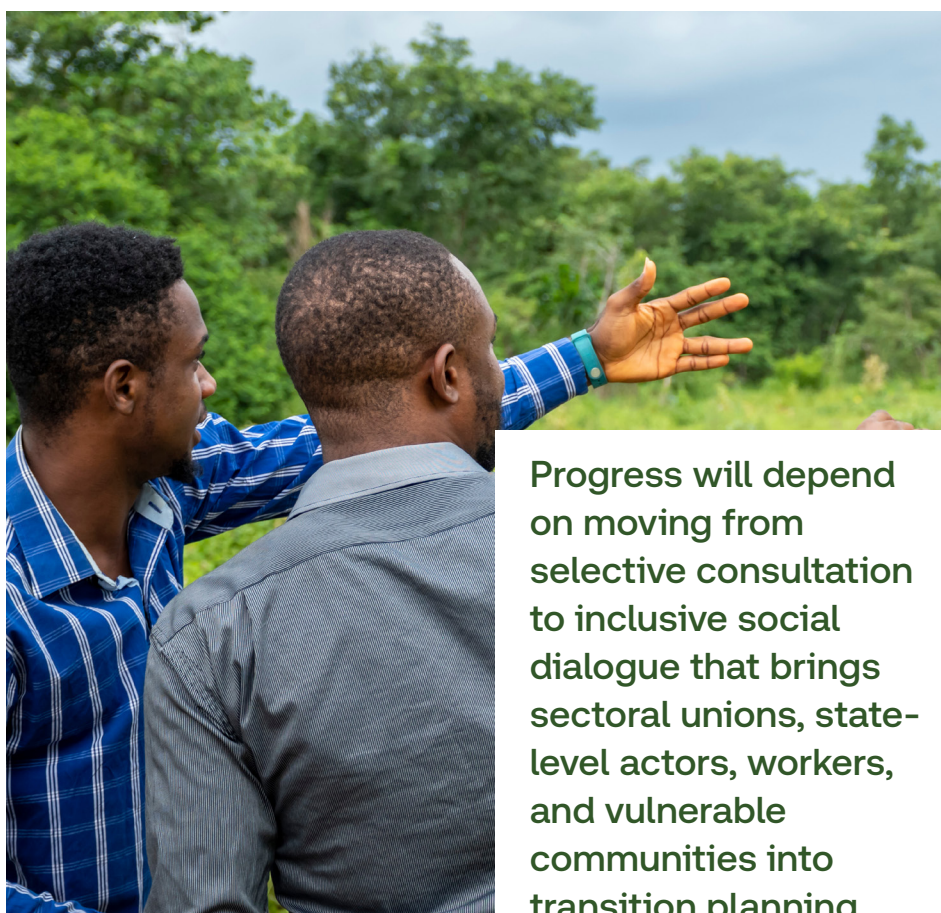
represented. A joint negotiating platform would strengthen labour's collective influence and reduce the risk of inconsistent or competing positions in climate-policy processes.

2. For federal and state governments

- Institutionalise inclusive social dialogue: The National Council on Climate Change and state governments should establish formal consultation mechanisms that include umbrella unions, sectoral unions, and subnational labour actors at earlier stages of transition planning. More inclusive participation would improve policy legitimacy and reduce labour distrust.
- Develop subnational just transition frameworks: State governments should translate national climate commitments into locally grounded transition strategies that identify vulnerable sectors, worker-support needs, and subnational economic priorities. Borno State's cleaner transport initiatives demonstrate both the opportunities and governance challenges of subnational transition experimentation.
- Link cleaner transport reforms to worker protection: Federal and state governments should integrate retraining schemes, income-support measures, and worker consultation into CNG and EV rollout programmes. Transition policies should not focus solely on technology deployment, but also on how workers and affected communities experience economic change in practice.
- Strengthen coordination across governance levels: Nigeria's transition governance requires stronger alignment between federal institutions, state governments, labour actors, and civil society organisations. Better coordination would support more consistent implementation, improve accountability, and reduce the risk of fragmented transition policies.



Nigeria's just transition agenda is ambitious but uneven. While organised labour, particularly the NLC, has become more active in climate governance, meaningful participation remains fragmented across sectors and governance levels.



This project focuses on studying **Just Transitions** by comparing concepts, policies, and strategies across 14 diverse countries to ensure a **socially just shift towards decarbonisation**. It aims to develop recommendations for climate-friendly structural changes that protect workers and vulnerable groups. The project is funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation – Just Transition: Aktivitäten im internationalen Vergleich 2021-582-2.

Contact details

Dr Temitayo Odeyemi
University of Birmingham, UK
✉ odeyemiisaac11@gmail.com

Boluwatife Ajibola
University of York, UK
✉ Ajibola.boluwatife50@gmail.com

Damilola Olorunshola
University of Bayreuth, Germany
✉ damilolaolorunshola7@gmail.com

Dr Kingsley Ogunne
Affiliation: University of Ibadan, Nigeria
✉ ogunneinfo@gmail.com

Professor Vera Trappmann
(Principal investigator and project lead)
University of Leeds
✉ V.Trappmann@leeds.ac.uk

Professor Dennis Eversberg (Project lead)
Goethe University Frankfurt
✉ Eversberg@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Find out more

Visit the website (<https://justtransition.leeds.ac.uk>)
for further information about this project, including full case study reports, podcast episodes, and articles.

Date of publication: June 2026