

Bringing Climate Justice into the European Green Deal — Recommendations for new Energy Partnerships with Africa

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In order to mitigate the climate crisis, the European Commission (EC) presented the European Green Deal in 2019, which aims to achieve climate neutrality for the continent by 2050. Since the potential for generating renewable energy in Europe is limited, the EU countries continue to rely on energy imports. As the EC did not yet specify on how energy partnerships should be shaped in order to be beneficial and fair for both sides, there is still room for interpretation and doubts in this regard. Hence, this paper highlights the question on how partnerships between the EU and African governments should be designed in order to enable climate justice for the importing as well as the exporting side. The multi-perspective and multi-level analysis depicts the importance of closely coordinated partnerships with a focus on specific energy carriers. Identifying and pursuing common starting points and goals between European Green Deal and the African Union's Agenda 2063 would allow for better coordination. Additionally, a greater consideration of the local context is another fundamental prerequisite for jointly shaping a more sustainable and climate-just inter-continental future.

Key Words: *European Green Deal, Energy Partnerships, Renewables, Climate Justice, Agenda*

Background

In a highly interconnected world it becomes increasingly impossible to take a spatially restricted view of cause-and-effect models. This is particularly evident in the ongoing climate crisis. While industrialized nations are the largest emitters per capita of greenhouse gases (GHG), the most serious consequences are mainly found in the global south. At 3.9% of global GHG emissions in 2019 (Our World in Data, 2021), African countries in particular record a comparatively low share and are thus only marginally responsible for the climate crisis, not least due to their historically low emission levels. These conditions define the core of the so-called concept of "climate injustice" (see box no. 1).

In 2019, the European Commission made a push to address the climate crisis by creating the European Green Deal. It sets the goal of being the first continent to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The EU's new

climate law reached a provisional agreement to reduce net GHG emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and reach a net-zero level by 2050. Thus, the deal offers huge potential to contribute to sustainable global development. The accompanying transformation processes can lead to more sustainable action not only in Europe but also in partner countries which are crucial to reaching the outlined goals. It is therefore also up to such countries to drive the momentum of a more sustainable transformation in their territories. Member states of the African Union (AU) can use the revenues from energy partnerships in particular to achieve the goals (esp. high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for all; well educated citizens; transformed economies and jobs) set out in the first aspiration of the AU's Agenda 2063, which is: "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" (African Union, 2021). For this purpose, however, they are

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Definition: Climate Justice

Box 1

Inspired by social justice, but rooted in discourses on the climate crisis, climate justice tackles the ethical and political aspects of climate change impacts and how they are unevenly distributed among countries and/or actors. (own definition)

obliged to seriously strive for the goals listed under the third aspiration, which is: "An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law" (African Union, 2021). Green Deal partnerships can have far-reaching positive implications for non-European countries if profits are generated fairly and used sustainably. Especially green hydrogen (i.e. hydrogen generated with renewable energies, henceforth GH₂) is regarded as a fuel which can be crucial in this regard as it is demanded increasingly in Europe and can be produced effectively in Europe's southern neighbourhood. Building on the EU Energy Union framework (2018), EU member states are to submit integrated, practice oriented national energy and climate plans that indicate how their goals are to be achieved. The EC's Governance Regulation requires EU member states to report on the progress of their energy and climate policies every five years and for the first time in March 2023. The review procedure will prescribe adjustments where necessary and will thus be legally contestable (European Commission, n. d.). However, it is not yet clear which member state will make which contribution and to what extent this will be achieved either through GHG reductions, removals or offsets. In this regard, it is essential to assess national carbon budgets to provide a basis for national strategies, as well as a reference for the monitoring of the implementation progress. On the supranational level, the European Commission will present its proposals for the Green Deal's implementation instruments (e. g. Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, revised EU Emissions Trading System) as part of the so-called Just Transition Mechanism later in 2021.

Brokering fair energy partnerships for climate justice

Since the European Green Deal is also an economic growth deal, it must be guaran-

teed that the member states' thirst for energy will also be satisfied in three decades' time and beyond. Here, the EU must balance on a fine line: The aim of the Energy and Climate Union enshrined in the European Green Deal is to reduce its dependence on external markets. As of today, it remains the world's largest energy importer (Europäischer Rat, 2020). At the same time, the potential for generating renewable energies is greater and prices are lower in the non-European neighbourhood. In light of this, the EU aims to "[e]stablish environment, energy and climate partnerships with the Eastern Partnership and Southern Neighbourhood" (European Commission, 2019:2).

Europe's green energy transition will require an expansion of production at locations with high potential to match its demands. Therefore, energy projects in non-EU countries, mostly in the southern neighbourhood, are receiving increasing attention, especially in regard to larger projects in Morocco and Tunisia (Bennis, 2021). In terms of the development priorities in the Agenda 2063 and the European Green Deal, clear differences of interest can be identified: AU's Agenda 2063 explicitly promotes poverty reduction and job creation (African Union, 2021), whereas this aspect is not prominent in the European Green Deal but still remains a key ambition in European national development agencies' agendas. In the same way that the Just Transition Mechanism provides regions within the EU with support programs to maintain social cohesion, train workers and young people for future jobs (European Commission 2021), contextual measures must also apply to partner countries outside the EU in order to act in a climate-, social- and environmental-just manner.

Learnings from cross-continental trading of green energies

A striking case in this regard is the multi-stakeholder *Desertec* project which was established in 2005 after several initiatives examined the promising potential of renewable energy production in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Schmitt,

2018:754). The general idea of the Desertec consortium was to create transcontinental power grids that link the MENA region and Europe. Certain developments, such as social uprisings in North African countries, laid beyond the influence of the project and restricted its success. However, a flawed design also led to the failure of Desertec. In regard to the latter, the cheap production of photovoltaic (PV) panels and its decentralised use in Europe was not anticipated by the Desertec initiative (ibid. 763). The project also required immense (and sometimes underestimated) investments in large energy grids (Scholvin, 2009:4). With increased domestic energy production in Europe, private investors stepped out of the project and hence contributed to the project's failure. The case shows the constraints of exporting renewable energy through intercontinental grids which did not suit the energy policies in most European countries.

Besides this restriction to exports, (renewable) energy supply is not yet high enough to meet the domestic demand in most African countries. *Desertec* put low emphasis on this and hence also faced significant backlash from locals. This also reflects that energy export should always be linked with the parallel goal to achieve national energy sovereignty of the exporting country. This is crucial as access to energy enables social and economic integration, and therefore should be legally guaranteed and practically realised by national governments. Decentralized energy production systems proved to make sense for achieving widespread electrification specifically in rural African areas (Tenenbaum et al., 2014:1-3). These are less capital intensive and their establishment can hence be supported publicly simultaneous to the procurement of larger grids and power plants.

In the medium term, green energy exports can still become important for African countries as they generate foreign exchange and make use of location advantages. In this regard, large-scale projects can produce specific energy carriers which do not require intercontinental grids to be transported. GH₂ in particular can be ap-

propriate for exports. This is because it is necessary for the carbon neutrality of European heavy industries and transport (Weischer et al., 2021:59; van den Berg, 2020:2). Currently, GH₂ is scarce and expensive. The increasing demand and high price give considerable incentives to focus on the fast development of GH₂ production. As many European grids are decentralised, it is less profitable to store the energy surplus from medium-scale power plants. Therefore, it is estimated that three-quarters of all GH₂ used in Germany will be imported (Kruse & Wedemeier, 2021:2). In contrast, the high energy demand of GH₂ production corresponds with economies of scale and the solar efficiency of large-scale plants in the European southern neighbourhood (ibid.). In sum, GH₂ will be demanded to a significant extent in the future. Through partnerships in GH₂-production, the mentioned constraints of *Desertec* can be addressed. Upcoming projects need to provide a level-playing field for companies that aim to invest and operate beyond borders. Besides, especially European countries can incentivise the development of renewable power plants through targeted investments in projects with clear criteria. Such projects have to bear principles in mind which correspond with the AU's Agenda 2063 and which are hence necessary for just partnerships. Such principles will be outlined in the following.

Policy recommendations for just energy partnerships

First, impacts for local communities in partner countries have also to be taken into consideration. This is crucial to achieve general approval for projects and to fulfil human rights duties. In this regard, the active and meaningful participation of local communities in decision-making must be guaranteed. In the event of project planning, working opportunities for local dwellers must be taken into account. This includes support for the education and training of people who will work in the construction and maintenance of the plants (Weischer et al., 2021:59). Besides local employment, the stress on local resources, such as land and water, has to be avoided or at least compensated. Both

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of these resources are needed for the production of GH₂. However, if project implementation considers these, it can lead to crucial co-benefits. For example, international investment in desalination plants can be tied to supplying the domestic and local water networks (ibid. 63). Besides, arable land is potentially being used for solar power plants. In this case, appropriate compensation for local land dependents is necessary. Such compensation but also the possible negative environmental effects of this land use change must be bargained with the active participation of those affected by projects. Second, European partners are obliged to take the domestic transition to renewables into account when planning projects. European and German development agencies can support this process with policy and technical advice (KFW, GIZ, IRENA, 2020:67). Further, funding for small- and medium-scale projects for domestic supply is a crucial part that has to be guaranteed and backed by public stakeholders in advance (ibid. 6). Third, the transportation costs of GH₂ are significant and pressure for decarbonisation of industrial products might increase internationally (e.g. through the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism). This incentivises GH₂-producing countries to use their effective renewable energy production for establishing domestic industries. It is not clear to which extent such 'upgraded' industries can compete with current companies on global markets. Such economies need political intervention to support the diversification of their economic sectors in order to prevent the risk of windfall economies at the core. Model projects for the production of less

sophisticated products (such as Ammonia in Morocco) can be a first step to estimating the potential of such upgrading (Weischer et al., 2021:61). With the European Green Deal aiming for an energy transformation in the EU, the use of GH₂ represents a promising alternative to existing energy sources, both fossil and green energies, but only for certain areas of application (esp. heavy industry, shipping and aviation). Energy exports from African countries could potentially stimulate the demand for these specific industries in Europe. Still, such undertakings need to be mindful of the outlined recommendations. Export revenues can only satisfy principles of climate, environmental, labor and social justice if a trickle-down effect is guaranteed. This means that the profits are used in such a way that those producing regions benefit from them first (e.g. through local business tax) and are used for nationwide welfare programs. If this is guaranteed, these new energy partnerships will bring benefits to all involved. In sum, European national development ministries and agencies have to consider the articulated national interests of the partner countries and AU's Agenda 2063 carefully to achieve partnerships that sufficiently correspond with the interests of its southern partners. A consolidation of AU's and EU's long-term climate diplomacy into an AU-EU climate plan could represent a firm foundation in order to be able to refer to common interests. In a broader scope, to achieve climate justice, multiple forms of justice must be respected on all levels of the Green Deal in order to not only be successful by reaching its goals but also in a fair and just manner.

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