

Photo: Climate Justice Alliance



COMMUNITY ASSEMBLIES

Fighting for our Future through a Just Transition



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Introduction

This booklet includes the material explained in the narrated presentation but written in a text form. It is not a transcript. You will find links (*marked in dark purple*) to some videos included in the presentation, as well as to additional material. Just click on the marked text to access them.

The goal is to provide you with material that can serve as a reference when organizing and facilitating a Community Assembly. You do not need to memorize the content included in this booklet. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Community Assemblies support staff.

If you plan to share any information we are presenting, we kindly ask that you include the following attribution:

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POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

It has been proven that climate change affects us all, but not equally. Despite increasing investments of millions of dollars to lower fossil fuel emissions, create greener technologies, and protect carbon sinks, that is, forested and other natural areas that absorb carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, the year 2023 was the hottest year on average for the planet.

If international governments are investing more in trying to address climate change, why does it seem like these approaches are not working?

The fact is that we are not addressing the root causes of climate change: Inequalities perpetuated by a capitalist society where profit is more important than the lives of people and other living organisms.

Therefore, it is important to consider topics of power and privilege in an intersectional manner, that is, considering the different identities and positionalities of a person, group, or community when exploring the unequal impacts of climate change:

- **“Power-** The ability to influence and control material, human, intellectual, and financial resources to achieve a desired outcome. Power is dynamic, and plays out in social, economic, and political relations between individuals and groups.
- **Privilege-** A set of typically unearned, exclusive benefits given to people who belong to specific social groups.”

-Global Health 50/50



[What is power?](#) | Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture | 7:01 minutes

Positions of privilege and marginalization are complex because cultural, political, social, geographic, and historical changes affect which groups are privileged and which groups are not. **Oppression** occurs in a system that maintains advantage-disadvantage based on social group memberships, operating intentionally and unintentionally on individual, institutional, and cultural levels. Social identities as well as prejudice and other biases are shaped by socialization processes.



Cycles of Socialization | Readings for Diversity and Social Justice | One page

The Civil Rights movement is a clear example of how a group that has lived under oppression can act on its power and promote change. The key is to recognize the need for change and do something to promote it. Justice is an interdependent process, founded on the ideas of equity and fairness, but in the end, it is not an external independent force, it is a result of social interactions.

Collective leadership is a grassroots approach to promote a disruptive and transformational multi-racial movement at different scales. However, this change starts at an individual level, rooted in self-awareness to recognize habitual behaviors linked to our multiple identities that shape our experiences and influence our impact on others and the world.

“

Any time you beg another man to set you free, you will never be free.
Freedom is something that you have to do for yourselves.

-Malcolm X

”

TRANSITION IS INEVITABLE. JUSTICE IS NOT

In the past decade, the concept of **Just Transition** has become more popular. It is referred to in the United Nations Paris Agreement and multiple political arenas around the world. However, a radical Just Transition is not a market-driven framework, nor does it focus only on solutions that reduce the climate crisis to a carbon problem that can be fixed with more green technologies and green jobs.

A *Just Transition* as proposed by [Front and Centered](#), [Climate Justice Alliance](#), [Movement Generation](#), and other grassroots organizations starts by recognizing that the current climate crisis is a consequence of an **extractive economy**, justified by a racist, hetero-patriarchal, colonial mindset intrinsic in and perpetuated by capitalism and neoliberal policies. Our world functions on a system where colonial legacies of exclusion, domination, and exploitation are still prevalent. In this system, humans and their relations, as well as nature, are commodified (commercialized or treated as something that can be bought and sold), due to the enclosure of wealth and power. Understanding where we come from, where we stand, and where we want to go is crucial to envision a strategic plan for change.

“Just Transition is a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy”

-Climate Justice Alliance

Let's reflect on what the word economy really means in this context:

ECO**HOME**comes from the Greek word *oikos***NOMY****MANAGEMENT**comes from the Greek word *nemein***ECONOMY****MANAGEMENT OF HOME**

Therefore economy relates to how our home is managed, in this case, our planet. It is not something good or bad per se, it all depends on how we manage the resources in our home, this is, the decisions and actions we all take and make. By *resources*, we do not mean money - an experience or the knowledge obtained through it can be a resource; traditions are a resource; ideas are a resource. It depends on whether the people honor and respect social, cultural, and natural resources or just abuse and neglect them.

When we think about our planet, it is made by living and non-living things that interact to produce new things. Humans are not an exception to this. An **ECO-SYSTEM** refers to the relationships between all these things that can be seen as resources. A deer needs water as a resource to stay hydrated and survive. Resources do not have a value on their own, they become valuable when they are used. All this is explained in the following video:



[**We Live in an Extractive Economy, But Can We Make it Better?**](#) | Upworthy | 7:45 minutes

In this sense, all economic activity has an ecological consequence. Indigenous communities have understood this since time immemorial and have integrated a balanced approach to how they manage their needs and any resources to fulfill them into their knowledge systems. Many of them recognize that humans are a part of nature and do not see a division between them, as is the case in Western societies where nature is perceived as something external that can be exploited or controlled. This dichotomized vision has led to centuries of plunder, extraction, and destruction that have disrupted the planetary systems leading to the current climate crisis and it is part of an *extractive economy*.

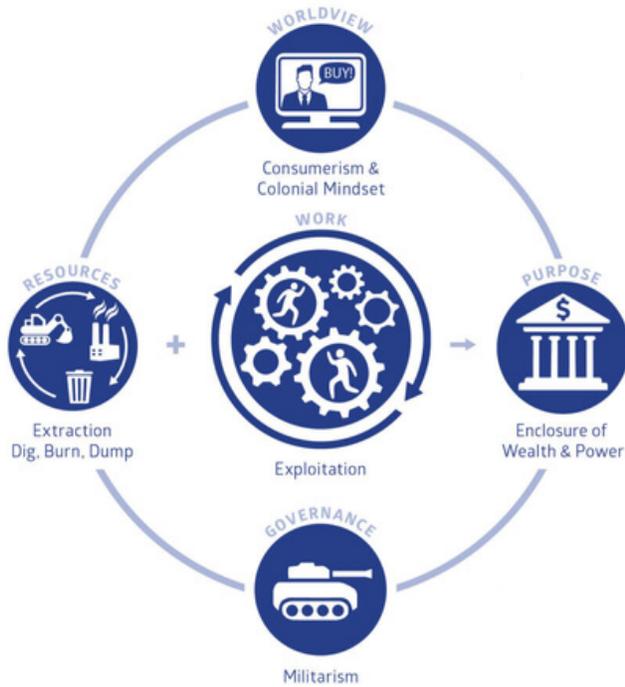


Figure developed by Movement Generation and adapted by Climate Justice Alliance

The current **Extractive Economy** is built on some main pillars:

1. The extraction and destruction of nature (for short, **natural resources**)
2. The exploitation of human labor (for short, **work**)
3. These are combined for the **purpose** of enclosure of wealth (material) and power (immaterial)
4. A colonial mindset or **worldview**, together with an increase in consumerism, is at the core of the culture, a factor that allows capitalism to spread, together with
5. **Governance** systems under which decision and rule-making processes are shaped. Colonialism and imperialism are enforced through militarism and totalitarianism.

Examples of an Extractive Economy include slavery, genocide, settler-colonialism, radical individualism, industrialized food systems, green colonialism, and any other ways that lead to the commodification of nature (for example, the REDD+ program and the natural capital framework). All of us, even when we try to move away, are part of the extractive economy. The following video explains how:



[The Story of Stuff](#) | Free Range Studios | 21:17 minutes

A Just Transition entails moving away from this Extractive Economy to a

Regenerative Economy

characterized by:

1. **Cooperation** between people to organize freely, set their interests, and identify their own needs. In this sense, *work* becomes an activity that goes beyond buying resources to cover needs, but a way to connect and collaborate with common goals that feel meaningful and can lead to a sense of fulfillment.
2. **Resources** that are seen beyond goods, as an essential part of the system that has to be managed carefully through regenerative practices such as agroecology.
3. Combination of resources and work to promote **social and ecological well-being**
4. A system rooted in a **culture or worldview of caring**.
5. **Deep democracy** serves as the *governance structure*, that is place-based and where people can have control of the decisions that affect their daily lives.

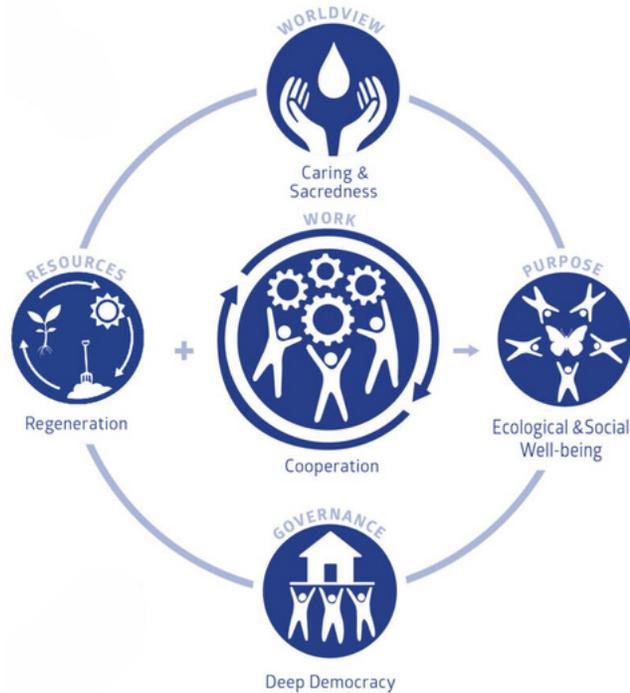
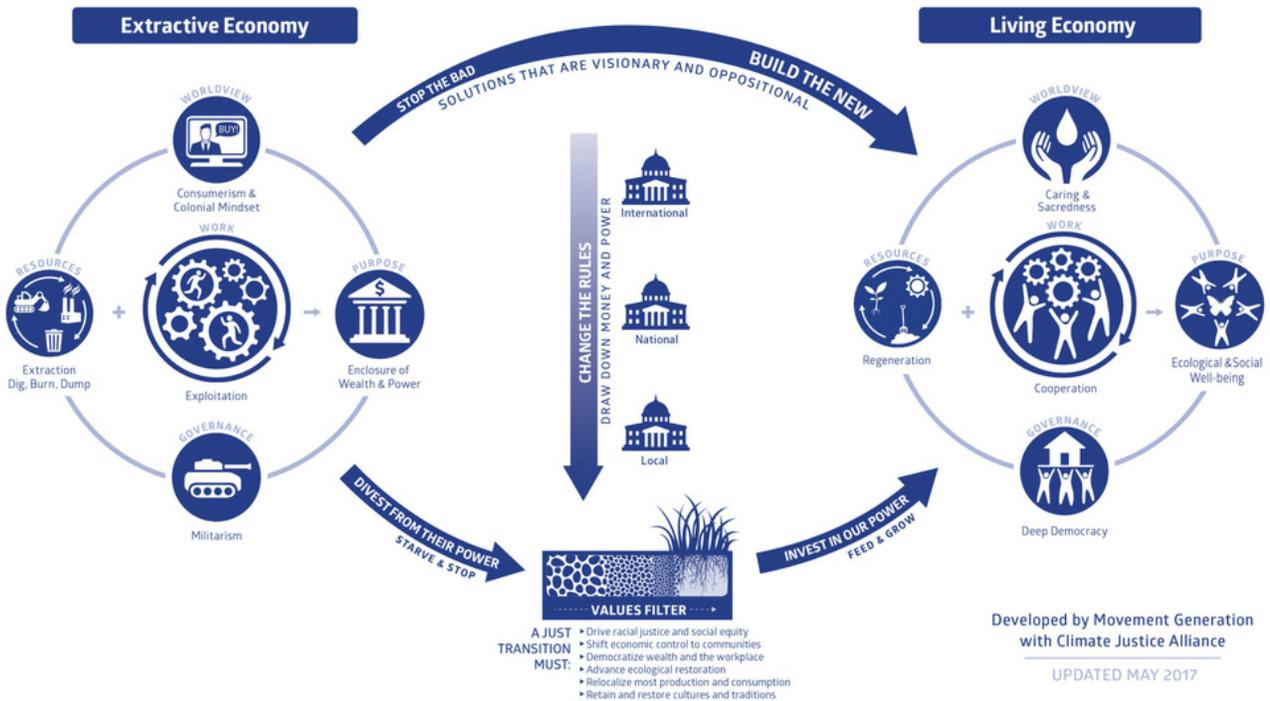


Figure developed by Movement Generation and adapted by Climate Justice Alliance

Examples of a regenerative economy are life-affirming, community-led, sustainable, and cooperative approaches rooted in deep democracy, where community members have control over the decisions to shape their daily lives.

In a Regenerative Economy, power is not seen anymore as an individual profit but as a collective endeavor. To move to a Regenerative Economy is necessary **STOP THE BAD** to **BUILD THE NEW** and **DIVEST FROM ENCLOSURE OF POWER AND WEALTH** in a few and **INVEST IN OUR POWER**.

A STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR JUST TRANSITION



A **Just Transition** must:

- Shift and diversify economic control (divest from their power)
- Democratize wealth and recognize the rights of nature
- Advance ecological restoration and value bio-cultural diversity
- Stop dig-burn-dump/industrial practices
- Shift values that feed production and consumption systems
- Retain and restore culture and traditions
- Promote racial justice and social equity

“

Power is not brute force and money; power is in your spirit. Power is in your soul. It is what your ancestors, your old people gave you. Power is in the earth; it is in your relationship to the earth.

-Winona LaDuke

”

A Just Transition requires community-led actions. It is a movement of movements that encompass **“strategies that democratize, decentralize and diversify economic activity while we dampen down consumption, and (re)distribute resources and power”** (Movement Generation). These strategies were initiated in the twentieth century by labor unions and environmental justice groups who started fighting for living salaries and better working conditions that would not harm people or the environment. The fight has expanded and taken different forms in different communities, but the vision is the same: Stop the bad and build the new through a deep democracy that allows workers and communities to have control over the decisions that affect their daily lives.

The process is not unilinear nor smooth, but it can be connected to shared principles that guide collective action, even across differences of time and space:

- **Buen vivir or “good life”**- *Sumak kawsay* is a form of living used by Quechua people in a community-centric, ecologically-balanced, and culturally sensitive way. It entails a harmonious way of life that respects people and nature, and has been integrated into the constitutions of several countries in South America (Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil) as part of the recognition of the [Rights of Nature](#). It recognizes that all human beings have the right to a healthy environment as well as to the means to fulfill their needs without favoring individuals or groups or superseding the rights of nature.
- **Meaningful work**- A way for people to learn, grow, and develop to their full capacities and interests, without endangering others. It is a way to contribute to our communities by developing our human potential. This can take the form of localized community-building jobs. Meaningful work is life-affirming.
- **Self Determination**- The right to participate in decision-making processes that impact our lives. Communities must have the power to shape their economies according to traditional and life-affirming ways of life. This entails having the power to shape the way we engage with each other and with nature, without inflicting more harm. It is a source of community resilience (the capacity to address, adapt, and overcome adversities). Food sovereignty is an example of self-determination.
- **Solidarity**- A meaningful+supportive way to engage with others that can lead to liberatory and transformative experiences, despite our differences. Local, regional, national, and international solidarity is needed when fighting against capitalism.

- **Equitable distribution of power and resources**- To fight historic and current social inequities it is necessary to reclaim the power and build a new system that recognizes the rights of everyone, not just a few. Decision-making cannot be only representative and must truly integrate the voices and experiences of all communities.
- **Regenerative Ecological Economics**- The advancement of ecological resilience requires moving away from practices of extraction, destruction, and overconsumption. It requires a re-localization and democratization of forms of production that are ethical and sustainable. Since the planet has limited resources, we need to consider not only our needs but the needs of others, including future generations. This means producing to live well without living better at the expense of others. This is possible through the creation and nurturing of local food systems, local and community-managed clean energy, small-scale sustainable production, and a circular economy.
- **Culture and Tradition**- Capitalism has reinforced a process of globalization that has forced many communities to sacrifice culture and tradition for economic survival. However, culture and traditions contain histories and forms of knowledge that resulted from centuries of ways in which people engaged with each other and with their natural environment. A Just Transition must rely on inclusion and consider reparations for the land stolen, as well as the opposition to the commodification of culture and other ways of destroying social connections.
- **Builds What We Need Now**- There is no time to wait, the change needs to happen at different scales to displace extractive and oppressive practices. For this, it is necessary to account for the communities' interests, not just their needs. This can start at a local level and expand to replace larger extractive systems.

“To liberate the soil and to liberate our souls we must decolonize our imaginations, remember our way forward and divorce ourselves from the comforts of empire. We must trust that deep in our cultures and ancestries is the diverse wisdom we need to navigate our way towards a world where we live in just relationships with each other and with the earth.

-Climate Justice Alliance

”

As we implement these principles, it is important to fight against **false solutions** that seem to offer short-term solutions but do not address root causes: Those practices that continue with extractive practices and the concentration of wealth+power (including technological and market-based schemes promoted by corporations and their political allies to give the appearance of meaningful climate action), that continue to poison, displace, or imprison communities, without addressing unequal environmental health disparities and climate injustices.

To recognize a just versus a false solution ask yourself: Who holds the agenda? Who has ownership over the apparent solution? Is it life-affirming? Does it promote self-determination or does it perpetuate a form of colonialism?

The power is in you to ask the questions necessary to understand if a solution is transformational or if it is just a false one that benefits mostly greedy corporations and people in power while perpetuating extraction and exploitation. Real solutions must tackle root systemic factors. The following video explores some ideas around collective endeavors:



[**The Story of Solutions**](#) | Free Range Solutions | 9:06 minutes



[**Frontline Communities & Workers Delegation Demand Real Climate Solution at COP26**](#) | It Takes Roots | 7:05 minutes

In sum, a Just Transition requires community-led, life-affirming, collective action. It goes beyond environmental and climate justice, although it encompasses them. It is not a framework that dictates solutions but one that promotes dialogue, collaboration, and action.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We invite you to explore the following resources to learn more about the different topics explored in this module. The depth and breadth of each resource varies but the goal is to show the many faces of each topic. Some are tools that allow us to explore issues at different scales. Feel free to choose those that look most interesting to you.

- [Just Transition](#). A handout created by the Climate Justice Alliance that summarizes the Just Transition framework and its principles.
- [From Banks and Tanks to Cooperation and Caring: A Strategic Framework for a Just Transition](#). A zine created by Movement Generation that explains in detail the Just Transition Framework.
- [Transition is Inevitable. Justice is Not](#). A video from Climate Justice Alliance contains the testimony of some community activists who incorporate the Just Transition framework into their work. Provides concrete examples of how organizations in the United States are fighting for a just future.
- [People's Solutions Lens](#). A short guide created by It Takes Roots with important questions to distinguish false from real climate solutions.
- [Thrive Agenda](#). A website created by the Indigenous Environmental Network with some proposed actions to create a Just Transition.
- [Hoodwinked in the Hothouse](#). A zine created by Climate False Solutions that explores examples of false solutions around the world.

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Learning Resource

