

Green Economy or Green Society?

Contestation and Policies for a Fair Transition

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Acronyms

CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CJM	Climate Justice Movement
COP 15	Copenhagen Climate Conference
CSO	Civil society organization
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DDS	Deccan Development Society
GDP	Gross domestic product
GMO	Genetically modified organism
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISSC	International Social Science Council
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
Rio+20	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
US	United States
WBCSD	World Business Council for Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

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Summary

Drawing insights from an UNRISD inquiry into the social dimensions of green economy, this paper examines key challenges facing policy makers and other actors in making social concerns more central to the green economy debates. While there is widespread agreement that the current global environmental challenge requires a major transformation, widely differing interpretations exist about the nature of this transformation, with competing assumptions about the institutions required and the drivers of change. Often, social issues are seen as residual to economic and environmental concerns, market-based green economy solutions tend to dominate policy and discourse, while redistributive or rights-based alternatives remain on the margins. And while social protection and “win-win” policies are beginning to integrate social concerns into market-based green economy mechanisms, it is also apparent that there is still a need for social, economic and environmental policy to connect in ways that are more integrated, complementary and synergistic. Crafting such an approach depends crucially on addressing the politics of governance itself.

Power relations, governance arrangements and participatory processes are central to how green economy—both conceptually and in policy terms—is envisaged and implemented. For example, there is a danger that the dominant forms of governance for a green economy transition are reproducing a conception of participation limited to stakeholder consultation. Organized efforts, collective action and gaining control over resources and institutions by disadvantaged groups often tend to get sidelined, despite the finding that more collaborative governance can facilitate resource mobilization, the pooling of competencies, and ensuring complementarities and synergies that otherwise would not exist.

The paper argues that any transformation must be both green *and* fair, leading to a green society, not just a green economy. To place “the social” more centrally in green economy and sustainable development debates, critical questions concern how, and at what stage, social dimensions are incorporated into problem definition, analysis and solutions; and whether the goals of equity, poverty reduction and inclusivity are in fact compatible with the policies and transition paths currently being adopted or considered. A necessary starting point is a more comprehensive definition and framework for the analysis of social issues—one in which the domains of society, economy and the environment, as well as political processes that underpin change, are explicitly recognized as closely connected and interdependent.

Towards this goal, the paper first identifies a wide range of social problems and other issues associated with green economy. The analysis also considers the social and developmental implications of different transition pathways, each of which implies different state, market and society relations. The remainder of the paper addresses how governments, civil society and other actors are responding—or might respond—to the challenge of promoting a green and fair economy. Specifically, social and other public policies can play a key role in mitigating unfair consequences, influencing behaviour and transforming patterns of inequality. Finally, the ways different actors—particularly social movements and those most disadvantaged—contest ideas and policies, participate in governance (in project design and implementation, public policy making and civil regulation), and organize and mobilize to resist and influence change, are also crucial social concerns.

The “social lens” developed in part 1 of this paper can be summarized as one that considers:

- **knowledge and values:** analysis of whose knowledge, worldviews and values frame agendas, set the discourse and influence policy; what forms of knowledge are excluded, marginalized or devalued;
- **social structures, institutions and relations:** analysis of how social institutions and relations affect patterns of exclusion or inclusion, underpin inequalities and vulnerability, and shape individual and collective behaviours and responses;

- **social impacts and distributional consequences:** analysis of how policy initiatives and strategies impact different social groups and relationships; how can policies be designed and implemented to avoid negative impacts, or adequate compensation mechanisms put in place;
- **social and public policies:** beyond the protection of those affected and human capital formation, analysis of policies associated with redistribution and social reproduction, and the interaction between economic, social and environmental choices and policies, as well as the complex relationships between these domains at micro and macro levels; and
- **social actors and agency:** analysis of forms of social organization, mobilization and participation at local, national and global levels, recognizing competing interests; actors are viewed not as passive recipients of state policies or victims of processes, but as proactive agents from whom innovative discourses, practices and proposals can emerge to challenge and reorient existing development strategies.

This analysis—drawn from empirical research across numerous country contexts—highlights both the centrality of social issues in green economy debates and some of the major challenges confronting policy makers in crafting transition pathways that are both green and fair. Policy responses, discussed in part 2 of the paper, include: (i) social protection and adaptation mechanisms such as forms of targeted assistance or retraining; (ii) policies or programmes that deliver co-benefits or achieve a win-win scenario, such as green jobs or incentives for green consumption; and (iii) transformative social policy that drives structural change. This third level of policy has the potential to move beyond the current focus on compensating losers or protecting the vulnerable, to tackle structural causes of vulnerability and achieve both green and social goals. To do this effectively, policies should:

- integrate sustainable environmental goals into core social policy objectives;
- incorporate uncertainties and complexities associated with climate change into conventional social policy analysis;
- ensure that economic policies are designed to meet core social and environmental, rather than simply growth, objectives;
- compensate losers and support adaptation through a range of social protection measures;
- create employment and facilitate the uptake of green economy jobs among disadvantaged groups;
- facilitate the participation of women as producers and citizens by alleviating the care burden; and
- minimize inequalities and entrenched disadvantage through redistributive and other social policies.

Crafting transition paths with this kind of policy coherence (that is, where macroeconomic and

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