



WHAT DOES A “JUST TRANSITION” MEAN FOR YOU?

Millions of people living in informal settlements experience high risks from **climate change**. The land they live on can be easily flooded or collapse in mudslides (on steep hills). Low quality housing, made from zinc with not enough ventilation, is less able to resist high winds. Heatwaves (which affect old people and young children most) can feel worse in informal settlements.

DID YOU KNOW



Climate change is caused by many things, like smoke from factories, creating electricity, driving cars and destroying forests. These gases (from burning coal, oil and gas) released into the air have caused our planet to heat up, changing our weather to become more extreme & unpredictable.

Government must play its part in upgrading informal settlements to help reduce vulnerability and increase the resilience of communities to climate change.

People in informal settlements are least responsible for the problem, but they’re the ones dealing with its effects, which isn’t fair. The poorest people who are vulnerable to pollution and disease because they live in parts of the city where they lack access to water, sanitation (toilets) and electricity also have to cope with the consequences of extreme weather, like flooding, heat stress and drought. It is difficult for people living in informal settlements to protect themselves from these threats the way people in higher income areas can.

DID YOU KNOW



Climate resilience is the ability of individuals, communities, businesses and systems within a city to survive, adapt and grow, no matter what kinds of stresses and shocks they experience from climate change.

We need new ideas and solutions to adapt and make smart choices – not only for ourselves, but our children too.

Scientists can tell us what might happen in the future because of a hotter planet, like higher sea levels, floods, heatwaves and droughts. Even though we don’t have all the answers yet, we do know that water and electricity are getting more expensive and government is struggling to provide them. Natural resources like water are running out, so making sure everyone has enough will be even more challenging in the future.

Changing our economy: will it be just?

To tackle climate change worldwide and reduce **carbon emissions**, South Africa is changing (or transitioning) its economy from one based on coal to one using **renewable energy**. To make sure this change is fair, it must be driven from the ground up. It must result in equal benefits for all, equal say for all, and be able to address existing injustice and inequality for people and for the environment.

DID YOU KNOW



Carbon emissions come from burning fossil fuels like coal, gas and petrol and from making cement. They are part of the greenhouse gases trapping heat and warming up our planet.

In 2023, the government proposed a plan to guide cities on how to plan and build differently, using less concrete and steel in construction, reduce waste and protect natural areas in a way that also addresses spatial and social inequality. This is called the **Just Urban Transition** and upgrading informal settlements is an important part of it. The Just Urban Transition framework agrees that government has to learn to work differently with communities, who must have an equal say in decisions that affect them.

DID YOU KNOW



Renewable energy is produced from sources like the sun, wind and water, which are natural and do not run out. It is also called ‘green energy’ because it doesn’t pollute the air or the water.

Here are some of the proposals that affect informal settlement upgrading:

- Making sure poorer households have access to reliable, affordable electricity – this could be through renewable energy sources like solar and wind. For example, solar-powered geysers could heat water and solar systems can provide energy for lighting, refrigeration, cooking and street lighting.
- Where possible energy, waste and sewerage could be locally managed. For example, community services could be responsible for handling and recycling waste and waste pickers could be employed.
- Quality homes and other buildings could be constructed using **eco-friendly** materials instead of zinc panels and concrete foundations. A focus of upgrading could be to make sure that all buildings are more **energy-efficient** by installing ceilings to increase insulation to keep buildings cool in heatwaves and warm in winter. In this process local jobs could be created and skills transferred.
- All structures could be painted with special paint to prevent fires (fire retardant).
- Community-based upgrading plans for climate resilience as well as community-based data would play vital roles.



Something is **energy-efficient** if it uses less energy to produce the same result. Energy efficient buildings use less energy to heat up and cool down.

DID YOU KNOW



Eco-friendly building materials are designed to have little or no damaging effect on the environment. They are produced using no or less harmful methods. Some examples are sandbags, mud bricks and straw.

DID YOU KNOW

Clearly, government can and must do more to work with residents in upgrading informal settlements, not only to reduce the impacts of climate change and improve peoples' lives, but also to ensure our generation and the next can thrive through access to jobs and opportunities.

What can you do?

- **Have your say**
Your views can influence this process. Make sure that the needs of informal settlement communities shape the process of decision making for upgrading.
- **Think ahead**
Start thinking and talking about the short-term and long-term improvements you think are necessary to upgrade your settlement into a place where you and your children can live and grow.
- **Get informed**
Many of the ideas in the government's plan are based on what has worked in small-scale, pilot projects. That means we need more information sharing and learning about what can work in different places. Learn more about solar power, biogas and eco-friendly building methods and what they mean for your upgrading process and your household. What has worked in other informal settlements? What has not worked and why?
- **Know your government**
Get to know your municipality and your ward councillor and learn about the different roles and responsibilities of national, provincial and local government in informal settlements upgrading.

Now is the time to make sure that government prioritises informal settlement upgrading as part of the just urban transition. Because, if the realities of people in informal settlements do not change, the transition will not be just.

This project is funded by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. It seeks to co-create an approach to informal settlement upgrading that is informed by the principles of a “just transition” and by the experiences of the women and men who live in informal settlements.



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