



Sustainable access: the role of energy distribution in a just transition in South Africa

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The current situation

- Despite a relatively high (>85%) household electrification rate, energy poverty levels are high
- Negative implications from forced use of dirty and dangerous fuels include indoor air pollution, deaths from fires, damage to infrastructure from illegal connections
- The main obstacle is cost: a basic 200Kwh per month of electricity is unaffordable for 50% of households
- Failure to address this means that we run the real risk of entrenching two energy systems, with dire consequences for decarbonisation, poverty and equity
- Current policy and advocacy efforts in respect of decarbonisation are focused almost entirely on generation, while the just transition debate is largely limited to jobs and economic activities in the coal sector
- There is very little appreciation of the importance of a re-orientation of distribution to achieve the goal of **sustainable access**, despite apparent policy goals

Our work

- Our programme focuses on research to
 - (i) Document and quantify the linkages between energy poverty, household poverty and inequality in South Africa
 - (ii) Identify the structural impediments to system change
 - (iii) Build a civil society coalition for change
- The distribution system is complex: the struggle between the competing goals of energy as development enabler and energy as the most important source of revenue for local municipalities has been comprehensively won by the latter. **It is unlikely that these structural barriers will be dismantled based solely on the basis of the need to decarbonise.**
- Our goal is to develop detailed proposals that make a strong empirical case for re-orientating distribution towards being a catalyser of economic opportunity, poverty reduction and equity
- Demonstrate that sustainable access represents a cost-effective socio-economic development strategy to reduce poverty, increase food security, generate additional livelihoods and reduce inequality.



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