



biowatch
SOUTH AFRICA

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice

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29 April 2022

Presidential Climate Commission

Attention: PCC Secretariat

By email: info@climatecommission.org.za

Biowatch SA Comments on the draft 'Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa' (dated February 2022)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the draft 'Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa' published for comment on the Presidential Climate Commission website.

Our submission follows below and consists of:

1. Introduction to Biowatch South Africa
2. Comments on the draft Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa.

Yours sincerely

Vanessa Black

Advocacy, Research and Policy Coordinator

1. Biowatch South Africa

Biowatch is a non-governmental organisation established in 1999, which strives for social and environmental justice within the context of food sovereignty. Biowatch works to challenge unsustainable agricultural practices and to advocate for socially and ecologically viable alternatives that safeguards people and land. This includes supporting smallholder farmers in KwaZulu-Natal; working with civil society to create joint understanding and action; and we have a long track record of working on policy issues concerning agriculture, biodiversity, and indigenous knowledge systems.

We therefore submit comments on the draft Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa in relation to those aspects impacting a transition in food and agricultural systems.

2. Comments on the draft 'Framework for a Just Transition in South Africa'

Biowatch very much supports the Vision for a Just Transition that is outlined in the Framework and the three core Principles to achieve this.

We also agree that agriculture is a key at risk sector in South Africa, however, believe that the analysis of challenges and solutions needs to be much more broadly framed than is currently done in the Framework. If we want to achieve a genuine and transformative 'Just Transition' the food system as a whole needs to be tackled to address issues of water and nutrition insecurity, social inequity, and climate and environmental harm, of which agricultural production is one aspect.

Globally, and in South Africa, the food system has become progressively industrialised with a focus on increasing production in a limited number of key commodity crops for global supply chains. These are primarily high energy grains and oil seeds for mass consumption as staples, and for processing and animal feed. The latest science from the IPCC and follow-on research¹ has indicated that the **industrialised food system contributes to around one third of global greenhouse gas emissions**. The industrialised food system is also controlled by a handful of multinational corporations at every step in these global value chains; maximising profit while externalising the costs of this to society in the form of impacts to our climate, biodiversity, health, nutrition, water, and land. Transformation of the food system is imperative, not only to mitigate climate change, but also to address these currently externalised costs and create a food system that is both socially and ecologically just – in keeping with the core principles of a Just Transition.

Given that southern Africa appears to be warming at twice the global average and the extremes of weather we have already suffered in the past few years (from approaching Day Zero's to serial cyclones and the recent catastrophic flooding in KZN and Eastern Cape), it is also important to improve the resilience of our food and agriculture systems.

We are, however, concerned that the Framework does not make clear proposals in transitioning agriculture other than needing to engage workers involved in impacted value chains further down the line and proposing Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) as an opportunity to seize (Page 5). Climate Smart Agriculture has been proposed as the way to address climate challenges in our policy for some time. In our view CSA mainly focuses on techno fixes to intensify production without changing the overall mode of production. For example, no-till practices using herbicides and tolerant GM crops, precision dosing of agrichemicals, planting alien timber plantations are among the CSA solutions that have been proposed. It cannot be ignored that this concept of 'climate-smart' agriculture (CSA) has its beginnings in promoting carbon finance for carbon sequestration in Africa's soils and is heavily influenced by the multinational corporations and northern countries in structures such as the Global

Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture. CSA can and has been used to ‘greenwash’ more business as usual.

We propose instead, that to ensure a Just Transition in our agriculture and food systems that we adopt Agroecological approaches that in addition to both mitigating and increasing resilience to climate change, would also multiple additional benefits in keeping with the core principles of a Just Transition. These benefits including ensuring greater access to affordable and nutritious foods, building local economies, reducing potable water consumption in agriculture (which currently consumes 60% of South Africa’s fresh water for irrigation), preventing toxic pollutants, reducing costs for producers, safer and dignified livelihoods, less waste from the food system, conserving our unique biodiversity, and more. Agroecology promotes diverse polycultural systems based on traditional and indigenous knowledge; in southern Africa this includes small grains and legumes that are more drought resistant than maize.

Agroecology is supported by a wide range of social movements, some governments, and international experts as the path to address climate change impact in relation to food systems together with full range of other sustainable development goals. See for example, the current UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri’s address to the IPCC Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture in October 2021ⁱⁱ where he advocates agroecology as the quickest proven means to ensure a Right to food. He notes that agroecology is more productive per unit area than industrial agriculture while increasing biodiversity and restoring carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorous cycles. But more importantly he stresses how agroecology starts with the question of power dynamics; addressing social inequalities by promoting local governance and sovereignty, and empowering of local communities where access to land and resources is a precondition to social and ecological responsiveness. Although in South Africa, agroecology has often been pigeon-holed as a subsistence practice, there are numerous international examples of its scalability.

Please find the attached two Biowatch Fact Sheets, which we include as part of this submission to further elaborate on our concerns around the impact of the industrial food system on climate change and why Agroecology should rather be the basis of a Just Transition instead of Climate Smart Agriculture:

1. **The Industrialised food system is driving climate change**
2. **Climate smart agriculture and why we say No!**

We would welcome further engagement on the potential for Agroecology in the Just Transition of our food system.

i Cripps, M. et al. 2021. Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions, *Nature Food* 2, pp. 198–209.

ii See https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/1%202021_10_12%20IPCC%20Koronivia_Michael%20Fakhri.pdf