

## CONCEPT NOTE

ARIN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2022

**THEME: *Enhancing communities' resilience through a just transition in Africa -What does COP 27 portend?***

### **Context**

The world ushers a 21<sup>st</sup> century that is marred with some of the greatest socio-economic, political and environmental challenges of all time. Among these challenges are Climate Change and the COVID-19 pandemic whose management has continued to be daunting and puzzling. This is mainly due to their nonlinear and non-iterative nature making them indeterminate in scope and scale. The resulting shocks and disruptions have adversely affected the resilience of the most vulnerable communities, including women, children and the elderly. These are the 'wicked' problems of this decade. Wicked problems bleed into each other and therefore call for transdisciplinary knowledge that cuts across institutions and cultures in their management.

In Africa, the impact of these shocks has been twofold, especially for the poor and the local communities. First is in actual negative impacts of the risks and disasters that have wrestled the resilience of communities owing to their exposure and limited adaptive capacity. Secondly, policies, governance and institutional structures to manage these shocks tend to be designed without community consultation and inclusion. Consequently, some of these decisions and policies have aggravated already existing problems and disrupted the socio-economic activities upon which their very livelihoods depend.

Initial efforts to manage the COVID-19 pandemic by governments through the directive from the World Health Organization (WHO) is an illustration of how equity and equality fail to be at the core of policy and the decision-making processes. The trade-offs between livelihoods took prominence without much consideration of the impact this had on the poor communities, including the labour market that had to come to a standstill. The pandemic further put to test the health and economic systems and their preparedness and capacity to handle any related challenges without creating new problems in the process.

The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) posits that while progress has been made in enhancing the resilience of communities in Africa, the effectiveness of these adaptation priorities has been questionable in that sections of communities affected have well adapted while others have been pushed to the edge. For the latter, this may be a vivid case of maladaptation. This is partly attributable to inequalities in policies, funding, and poor alignment of adaptation interventions (IPCC, 2022)

It is imperative to note that inequality shapes any transition and, if it is not accounted for in design, implementation or evaluation, such interventions may either be ineffectual or worse, increase the vulnerability of those they seek to aid (Ireland and McKinnon, 2013, Shackleton et al., 2015, Schipper et al., 2020). Subsequently, what requires interrogation is how the transition can be just. This approach should be equitable and adequate to safeguard the livelihoods, rights of the poor and marginalized communities within the

framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A simple simulation of just energy transition may be that which achieves the desired goal of 100% clean and renewable energy while enhancing the social and economic concerns of communities. It provides a framework for sustainable shifts based on justice and equity. It is with this understanding that the Africa Research and Impact Network (ARIN) 2022 International Conference seeks to interrogate pathways through which just transition processes in Africa could rebuild more resilient local communities. The conference will focus on three major thematic areas on just transition:

1. Envisioning a just transition for Africa
2. Building just and resilient community systems
3. Decolonizing policy research toward resilient communities

### **Envisioning a just transition in the context of COP 27 (Convener, Dr. Joanes Atela)**

In line with the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015, a just transition asserts Africa's right to progress and industrialization. It is based on the negotiated language of equity, and the concept of shared but differentiated responsibilities and considers different national circumstances. It implies that Africa gets a larger redistribution of wealth and ensures that climate action occurs concurrently with development and in turn creates more green jobs. While a just transition is very critical in the African discourse, it should be relevant to the socio-economic milieu, considering visions and principles that govern Africa's institutions and structures.

In Africa, the Just Transition has a special resonance and faces unique challenges. Climate change is having an increasing impact on the African continent, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable and leading to food insecurity, mass displacement of people, and scarcity of water resources among others. This theme will explore the fundamental elements that underpin just transition in Africa including how the discourse is framed and pursued among different groups. The theme will capture a reflection on the COP 27 outcomes and implications for the just transition discourse in Africa.

#### **The specific questions to be explored include:**

- What does a just transition mean for African countries? What narratives underpin it and what is the place for local communities in the discourse?
- How can local priorities be reconciled with donors' definitions of the 'green and just' transition for Africa?
- What do the outcomes of COP27 mean for the just transition discourse in Africa and especially for the marginalized and vulnerable groups?

## **Building just and resilient community systems (Convener- Mr. Charles Tonui)**

This theme will focus on the implications of transition processes on local community systems with a focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, children, and persons living with disabilities among others. The processes, discourses, and outcomes of pursuing a transition in response to shocks/interruptions often have varied implications on local communities with some aggravating existing problems while others remain unchanged. While just transition is often conceptualized to support socioeconomic justice, especially for the vulnerable, these marginalized groups are often left in the peripheries of the processes and decisions defining transitions. The need to clearly understand technological, financial, and governance pathways through which transition can be made more just to rebuild resilient communities is important. This theme will focus on the following questions:

- What are some pro-poor innovations that can enhance local resilience to climate change and disaster risks and primary health care in response to pandemics?
- In what ways can locally-led innovations support the translation of research into impact? (Side event)

## **Decolonizing policy research towards resilient communities (Convener- Dr. Asenath Maobe)**

Many global challenges such as climate change are outcomes of development coloniality. Indigenous communities center a key feature of decolonization on the conceptualization of relationality. From this point of view, it becomes crucial for efforts on climate change adaptation and transformation to be founded on decoloniality practices and imaginaries. A resilient community can govern itself and manage risks autonomously by becoming more adaptive and responsive to possible hazards, mitigating problems, and maintaining societal equilibrium in predominant Eurocentric policy imaginaries thus enabling it to rapidly bounce back to normal conditions (Chandler, 2021). However, the same cannot be said of African countries where colonial legacies characterized by unequal power dynamics and economic inequalities continue to affect major knowledge systems on climate change and the environment. Current production of knowledge and climate research framings are governed by international institutions like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which are mainly controlled by the Global North (Daszkiewicz et al 2022). Moreover, researchers and institutions from the Global North are likewise over represented in academic publications that represent a bigger percentage of the climate knowledge economy and settings associated with research agendas. Nevertheless, local communities most of whom are negatively impacted by the climate crisis hardly get involved in framing climate research and proposing solutions.

Compared to other continents, Africa is most susceptible to the effects of climate change and environmental stress. Climate change and environmental stress can negatively affect

the financial well-being of poor populations. As such, the predisposition of Africa to harsh climatic and environmental conditions will fundamentally depend on its present and future capacities to adapt to prevailing circumstances (Amo-Agyemang, 2021). Decolonizing policy and research while empowering local communities is therefore key if the resilience of communities and practices endangered by climate change are to be improved. This theme will thus tackle the following questions:

- What are the underlying drivers of coloniality of expertise, policies, finances, and partnerships in the global knowledge of resilience?
- What innovations exist to decolonize expertise, policies, finances, and partnerships toward a just and pro-poor transition to resilient communities?