



Towards a Just Energy Transition in Colombia: Rights, Territories, and Climate Action

Context

The First International Conference on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels in Santa Marta takes place at a critical moment for global climate action. Despite international commitments, the energy transition is not advancing at the scale or speed required to limit global warming to 1.5°C, as warned by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which highlights the urgent need for immediate and deep emission reductions across all sectors, particularly energy.

In Colombia, this challenge unfolds within a context of high dependence on fossil fuels, which have historically been a pillar of the national economy but also a source of socio-environmental conflicts, ecological degradation, and human rights violations. Despite progress in renewable energy and climate commitments such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), significant gaps remain in their implementation, particularly in terms of transparency, participation, and territorial coherence.

The energy transition must be understood as a structural transformation of the development model, one that integrates climate action, social justice, environmental democracy, transparent financing, and the effective implementation of international commitments.

Diagnóstico

The energy transition in Colombia faces structural tensions that put its fairness and sustainability at risk.

First, there is a persistent dependence on fossil fuels within the national economy. Oil remains one of the country's main export products, representing a significant share of fiscal and external revenues. This dependence has driven the expansion of oil blocks even into environmentally sensitive areas: AAS has documented that dozens of oil blocks overlap with Indigenous territories in the Amazon, posing risks to territorial rights and ecosystem integrity.

Likewise, AAS research in the Amazon foothills shows that oil activities have caused water contamination, affected rural livelihoods, and generated persistent socio-environmental conflicts, as well as violations of the right to prior consultation in Indigenous territories. Recent cases where communities have successfully halted oil projects reveal both territorial resistance and institutional weaknesses in guaranteeing access rights.¹

¹ In 2024, we identified 39 projects in the Caguán–Putumayo region: 24 active and 15 suspended. Most suspensions are due to social conflict, public order issues, or environmental permitting processes. Among the institutional shortcomings that exacerbate the risks associated with these projects, we identified: (i) the lack of State-generated environmental information; (ii) non-compliance with and lack of follow-up on judicial rulings; (iii) the absence of guarantees for environmental defenders; and (iv) the failure to implement mechanisms contemplated under the Escazú Agreement.



Second, the “transition” narrative has incorporated technological solutions that may perpetuate fossil fuel dependence. For example, hydrogen -particularly blue hydrogen- has been promoted as an energy alternative; however, scientific evidence indicates that it may only marginally reduce emissions compared to grey hydrogen, due to methane leakage and limitations in carbon capture.

Third, there is a structural deficit in transparency and access to information in the energy sector. Information on contracts, environmental impacts, subsidies, safeguards, and transition plans is not always accessible, timely, or understandable for communities. AAS has highlighted the need to strengthen access-to-information tools in the oil sector as a condition for environmental democracy.

Fourth, the energy transition risks opening new extractive frontiers associated with critical minerals and large-scale energy infrastructure, shifting pressures onto vulnerable territories without adequate safeguards. This risk is deepened by the growing investments of multilateral development banks in critical minerals, reinforcing the urgency of robust standards for prevention, transparency, participation, and protection of environmental defenders.

Finally, there is weak articulation between energy, climate, and territorial policies. Although Colombia has advanced its NDCs -including the recent incorporation of actions to promote energy transition through the program Just Energy Transition: A Path Without Fossil Fuels- there are still gaps in implementation, monitoring mechanisms, and alignment with climate transparency frameworks, limiting their credibility and effectiveness.

Key Messages

- There is no just energy transition without a real, progressive, and transparent reduction of fossil fuels.
- Without public and prior information, there is no participation; without binding participation, there is no just transition.
- The energy transition must not become a new form of extractivism under “green” narratives.
- Territories are not sacrifice zones: they must be at the center of energy decision-making.
- Respect for human and territorial rights, including free, prior, and informed consent, is non-negotiable.
- The energy transition is not just a technological shift: it is a dispute over the development model.
- Climate finance must recognize and prioritize local communities and Indigenous peoples who sustain the ecosystems where transition projects are implemented.
- Without structural transparency on subsidies, contracts, and impacts, there is no accountability.
- The transition must include safeguards to prevent new extractive frontiers and protect strategic ecosystems.
- There can be no energy transition without an economic transition: dignified alternatives are needed for territories and workers.
- Energy transition decisions must align with existing national instruments and strengthen their implementation, rather than create parallel agendas without execution capacity.
- The transition must recognize common but differentiated responsibilities and demand ambitious commitments from historically high-emitting countries.
- The energy transition cannot depend solely on political will: it requires verifiable commitments, governance coherence, and collective action at the scale of the climate crisis.



Recommendations

Progressive phase-out of fossil fuels

Adopt binding roadmaps for the gradual reduction of oil, gas, and coal, with clear targets aligned with 1.5°C and integrated into NDC implementation.

Transparency and access to information

Ensure public, open, and accessible systems on energy production, contracts, subsidies, impacts, and financing, strengthening citizen access to clear and prior information in line with the Escazú Agreement and the Enhanced Transparency Framework of the Paris Agreement.

Binding participation

Establish institutional mechanisms for effective and binding community participation in energy decisions, including prior consultation and deliberative processes.

Safeguards for the transition

Adopt robust socio-environmental safeguards for transition projects (renewables, hydrogen, critical minerals financed by multilateral banks), avoiding new extractive frontiers and socio-environmental conflicts.

Just climate finance

Prioritize non-debt-based financing to support territorial economic reconversion and a just transition.

Territorial approach

Ensure that the transition responds to local realities, protecting strategic ecosystems such as the Amazon and respecting the rights of peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities.

Critical assessment of new technologies

Ensure that technologies such as hydrogen are implemented under criteria of sustainability, transparency, and justice, avoiding fossil lock-in.

Community energy

Promote decentralized renewable energy models that strengthen energy sovereignty and territorial well-being.

A just energy transition is not only a climate goal. It is a condition for social justice, the protection of territories, and the sustainability of life. Advancing it requires structural decisions, transparency, and verifiable commitments commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis.

