

T20 Policy Brief

Task Force 06

STRENGTHENING MULTILATERALISM AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

A Just Land Transition for Drylands

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Abstract

A just transition aims to green the economy in a way that is fair and inclusive, creates decent work opportunities, and leaves no one behind.

Whilst just transition is applicable to all sectors and stakeholders in our global economy, to date it has been predominantly associated with the climate change convention (UNFCCC) and decarbonizing the energy sector. However, it is the land management sector (agriculture and pastoralism), which engages the largest and most climate vulnerable populations globally and where a just transition will be most impactful on ecosystems, food and water security, and day-to-day lives.

The imperative to understand and apply a “Just Land Transition” is particularly urgent in global drylands. These water scarce zones cover over 45% of total land area, are home to one-in-three people globally and contain almost half of all croplands and livestock. However, up to 35% of drylands are already degraded, and this figure is rising.

This policy brief, which supports the Brazil G20 Presidency theme of building a just world and a sustainable planet, aims to “rethink” just transition for sustainable land management and land restoration, with a focus on dryland zones. The brief introduces the importance of the pivot of just transition towards broader Rio Convention applications beyond the UNFCCC. The brief outlines recommendations for the G20 to support Just Land Transition via new norms and standards, governance, financing, and social inclusion interventions. As such, the brief supports the Brazilian G20 Presidency policy on new norms for international development cooperation and confronting global challenges.

The brief builds upon the G20 Global Land Initiative, which was launched by G20 leaders in 2020 with the ambition to achieve a 50% reduction in degraded land by 2040. It also aims to inform the upcoming 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).



Diagnosis of the Issue

Just Transition (JT) emerged as a concept in the 1980s. Today, it is an accepted pathway to greening the economy, while promoting fairness and inclusivity, decent employment, and leaving no one behind.

Arguably, the ambitions set by the three Rio Conventions – on biodiversity, climate change, and desertification – cannot be achieved, individually or collectively, without JT as a shared foundation. To date, JT has been most strongly integrated into the climate change convention, evidenced by its citation in the 2015 Paris Agreement preamble; defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); and prioritized by the IPCC alongside equity, climate justice, social justice, and inclusion (IPCC 2023). Major JT announcements have typically aligned with UNFCCC processes¹ and most JT-related initiatives currently focus on energy.

Hence, there is a need to broaden the integration of JT into the remaining Rio Conventions, with multisectoral application. In preparation for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) COP16, this policy brief explores JT in the context of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and drought resilience – Just Land Transition (JLT) – with a focus on drylands. G20 leadership could support such a transformational reframing.

Drylands refer to arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid regions, covering over 45% of total land area and home to one-in-three people globally. Up to 35% of the world's

¹ Such as the multilateral development bank Just Transition High-Level Principles.



drylands are already degraded² and this figure is rising. Hence, the rationale for a JLT in drylands is multidimensional, including:

- Food insecurity and out-migration risks: Globally, 44% of croplands and 50% of livestock are found in drylands. About three-quarters of drylands are considered rangelands and used by pastoralists primarily for extensive livestock production, while nearly 20% are used to grow crops in rain-fed or irrigated farming systems (UNCCD 2017). Degradation can reduce yields and local opportunities.
- Vulnerable communities: Degraded drylands risk the health and wellbeing of ~1 billion people in over 100 countries, especially poor rural communities and small-scale farmers, women, youth, and indigenous peoples (UNCCD 2022).
- Gender inequities: Women constitute 43% of agriculture workers globally but own less than 20% of land (FAO 2023).
- Disproportionate transition impacts: Agriculture employs more than a quarter of the global workforce, far greater than the less than 2% for energy and related sectors (IEA 2022).
- Contribution to climate change: Almost one quarter of total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions derive from agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU) (IPCC 2019).
- Value losses: The costs of land degradation is estimated to be ~10% of annual global GDP (IPBES Secretariat 2018), with an estimated loss in ecosystem services valued at USD 6.3 trillion annually (World Bank 2022).

² Defined as the loss or reduction in the biological and/or economic productivity of the land.



- Interconnectedness between land, climate change, and biodiversity: Land degradation is both cause and effect of climate change and biodiversity loss, and undermines ecosystem services such as clean drinking water, carbon sequestration, and air quality regulation.

Whilst the costs of inaction in response to the above threats may be dire, encouragingly, global, regional, and national ambitions to transform the way we use and manage our land resources are emerging. The G20 Global Land Initiative (G20 GLI), launched under the G20 process, aims to prevent, halt and reverse land degradation with an ambition to reduce degraded land by 50% by 2040. To date, over 115 countries have committed to achieving land degradation neutrality with pledges to have more than 1 billion hectares under restoration by 2030 (PBL 2022). Whilst such high-level commitments are critical, JLT will be required to translate them into action and to achieve the multiple objectives of SLM and restoration initiatives.

Hence, a JLT in this context may be defined as a shift to inclusive economies and societies that are fair, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable; that reduce inequalities and poverty; and that uphold the human rights of communities affected by environmental degradation and to implement response measures needed to address it³. To address land degradation and drought the following needs to be promoted: (i) land degradation neutrality, (ii) transforming food systems, (iii) enhancing the resilience of land and water resources via SLM, and (iv) creating more sustainable cities and urban development. To ensure a JLT risks need to be managed and transition opportunities optimised (see Figure 1).

³ Drawing from UNHCR & ILO n.d. and Liese n.d.

More sustainable cities and urban development.

<p>⚠ Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More expensive and longer construction and planning processes. Increases in property and land prices. Informal settlements with poverty, environmental and health issues. Rural to urban migration to take advantage of better living standards. 	<p>💡 Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased wellbeing from cooler, greener and more sustainable cities.
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Transforming food systems.

<p>⚠ Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Price increases for consumers. More labour-intensive / expensive for farmer. Job losses in commercial production. 	<p>💡 Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift to a decentralised production model. Creation of green jobs and income in rural areas.
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<p>⚠ Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considerable investment required. Limited scope to unsustainable production increases prices. Without local involvement: Restrictions to access and use. 	<p>💡 Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased productivity of land supports different land-based value chains and ecosystem services.
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<p>⚠ Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Without local involvement: Efforts are short-lived. New inputs and access to markets required. 	<p>💡 Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift to more sustainable production and consumption patterns. With local involvement: Enhanced productivity and livelihoods.
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Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality

Enhancing resilience of land and water resources through SLM.

FIGURE 1. Potential socio-economic risks and opportunities of addressing land degradation.

Recommendations

JLT must include political attention to both processes and outcomes, namely (i) procedural justice, or the meaningful participation of stakeholders in planning and decision-making, and (ii) distributive justice, or the fair and equitable distribution of burdens and benefits of a JLT across all dimensions of sustainable development (Just Rural Transition 2023).

A JLT in drylands must mitigate potential negative impacts of change, optimize opportunities, and address structural inequalities. To be transformational, the process must be inclusive and expansive, empowering all stakeholders (Figure 2).

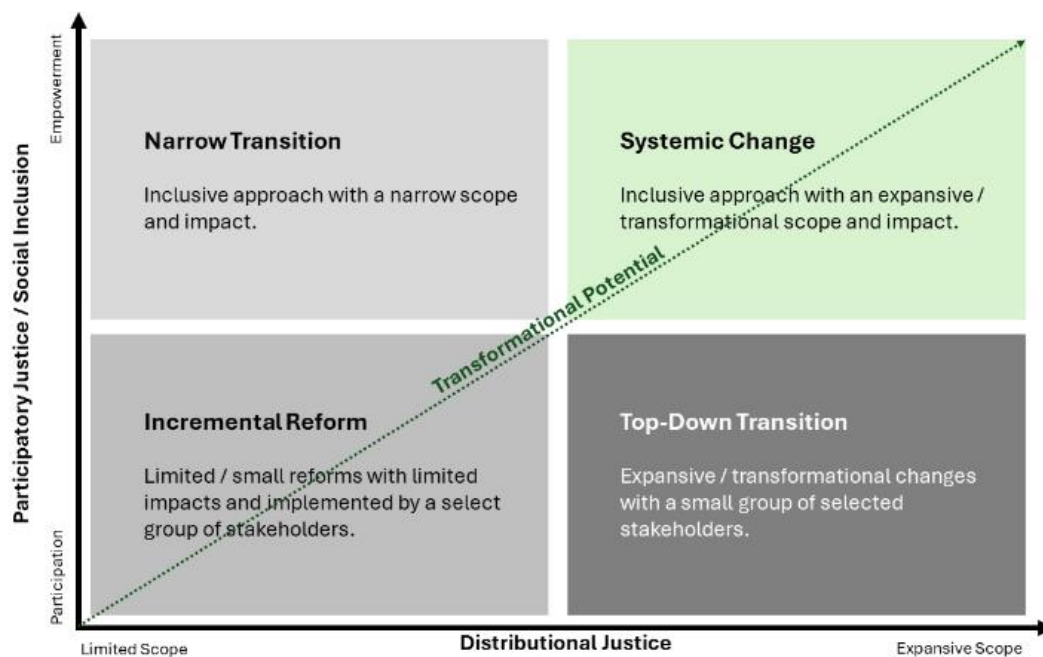


FIGURE 2. Framing the transformational potential of JLT (adapted from CIF 2022).



To support this systemic change, four action areas are recommended for G20 consideration.

- **New Norms and Standards**

JLT requires new norms that prioritise SLM and restoration in drylands. Collectively, the G20 represent greater than half of the world's land area, more than 85% of global GDP and over two-thirds of total population and have the economic power and political influence to set new norms and standards for the SLM.

To promote sustainable development and effectively address hunger, poverty, and inequality, G20 governments should ensure that land issues are mainstreamed across the G20 agenda. Through the Global Initiative on Reducing Land Degradation and Enhancing Conservation of Terrestrial Habitats, the G20 has provided a platform and initiative for global cooperation and commitments to address land degradation. The G20 GLI works through cross-cutting principles that focus on impacts on terrestrial ecosystems, the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement, and the promotion of inclusive governance. Given the cross-cutting nature of the G20 agenda, there is scope for JLT to be a connector between Rio Conventions and mobilize resources towards broader SDG support.

Recommendations for G20 consideration:

- *Formulate and adopt G20 Guiding Principles on JLT, to guide JLT efforts globally and prioritizing dryland SLM and restoration. The principles can provide a blueprint for action in G20 and non-G20 countries.*

- *Broaden JT support to include JLT, including promotion at G20 forums and events and inclusion in key G20 Sherpa and Finance tracks⁴. This will provide important signalling and continuity of G20 support for SLM and restoration.*
- *Promote JLT as common connector between Rio Conventions, including as a priority topic via the G20 Environment and Climate Sustainability Sherpa Track.*

- **Governance**

JLT requires inclusive and responsible land governance that incentivizes and empowers relevant authorities, including at local level. Transformations towards sustainability involve changing power dynamics, distribution of resources, and decision-making processes, which may often be contested. Governance arrangements must give voices to multiple actors to facilitate nested decision scales to contribute to ongoing decision support systems. Polycentric or multilevel governance systems, that encourage systematic vertical and horizontal coordination, can foster trust, equality, and inclusivity (Schweizer et al. 2022).

At local levels, security of land tenure rights underpins socio-economic relations surrounding natural resource use (Holland et al. 2022). Tenure rights protect vulnerable groups from deepening poverty and provide confidence to invest in SLM.

Recommendations for G20 consideration:

- *Support member countries catalyse action towards land degradation neutrality.*

⁴ Such as Sustainable Finance Track, Financial Inclusion Track, Development Sherpa Track, Environment and Climate Sustainability Track, and Agriculture Sherpa Track. Additionally, Task Force for a Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty.



- *Encourage strengthening of G20 national government policies on SLM and restoration, as well as globally through the G20 GLI and other G20 initiatives.*
- *Strengthen legal frameworks to protect land tenure rights in G20 member countries.*
- *Foster capacity building and knowledge sharing to promote participatory governance frameworks, including land tenure rights reforms for marginalized communities in non-member countries.*

- **Financing**

JLT will require both the scaling of existing financial mechanisms and development of innovative financial mechanisms that recognise the value of dryland ecosystems and communities. The current lack of fiscal space and access to global finance prevents many non-G20 countries from investing in nature-positive land use. Financial support must be mobilized from multiple sources, adhering to environmental, social, and governance criteria.

G20 governments can mobilize financial resources, send clear signals, and create an enabling environment for investment in nature and people by rebalancing fiscal policies and trade tariffs. Governments, public sector institutions and development finance institutions can act as keystone investors by providing catalytic and core capital through results-based financing schemes. In addition, G20 governments could support the nature investment case by harnessing the potential of carbon and other emerging markets for ecosystem services and facilitate concessional capital to reduce the emerging business model risks.



Finally, there may be transferable learnings from recent JT vehicles, such as Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), under which billions of dollars has been committed to crowd-in finance for nationally impactful investments.

Recommendations for G20 consideration:

- *Establish an SLM and restoration financing vehicle – a Just Land Transition Partnership (JLTP) (after JETPs) – to mobilize private sector and national finance. JLTPs could potentially be administered within the G20 GLI.*
- *Support knowledge generation on sustainable public and private financing mechanisms – both scaling of current modalities and introducing new modalities – to support enhanced dryland SLM and restoration.*
- *Encourage greater International Financial Institution (IFI) keystone finance mobilization for dryland SLM and restoration.*

- **Social Inclusion**

JLT requires rights-based and people-centred approaches that redress structural inequalities, ensure access to land resources and tenure security and capacity building. Strengthening equitable land use planning and governance to manage competition and trade-offs between different land uses is essential. This includes empowering local stakeholders, including women and youth, and protecting land and resource rights of indigenous communities.

Land policies and actions should foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. Local green jobs and employment opportunities can be created through land restoration and land-based industries. To level the playing field for communities,

improved access to credit and incentives for sustainable/ restorative livelihoods are required.

In addition, linkages between rural, peri-urban and urban areas need to be strengthened via inclusive and sustainable value chains and the productive infrastructure and services they support.

Recommendations for G20 consideration:

- *Integrate human-centric and socially inclusive components of JLT across relevant G20 tracks and workstreams.*
- *Establish a joint G20 Task Force on Inclusive Land Management.*
- *Enhance collaborative mechanisms between the G20 and its engagement groups (e.g. Civil20, Youth20, Women20) via JLT thematic workshops.*

For its part, the UNCCD commits to supporting JLT at COP16 and beyond.



Scenario of Outcomes

By broadening the application of the concept of JT to include “Just Land Transition”, and mainstreaming the concept at key fora, the G20 can support ambitious policy and finance progress for sustainable dryland management in the lead-up to, at and beyond UNCCD COP16. Mainstreaming JLT into different Sherpa and Finance Tracks can considerably increase the profile of sustainable and inclusive dryland management and ongoing efforts related to facilitating a JLT. The increased importance and promotion of JLT in drylands by the G20 encourages existing initiatives (such as the Middle East Green Initiative, Great Green Wall, Global Land Initiative, etc.) to embed the concept and its principles to support transformational systemic change and lead to the development of new initiatives and alliances. This can contribute to building new partnerships and enhancing access to finance for dryland communities to drive their own green and business initiatives.

The more integrated and holistic approach to JT across the three Rio Conventions can encourage governments to widely integrate JLT principles at the policy level, including agriculture, rural development, environment, as well as climate change. By promoting governance systems and policies that adequately address local concerns and priorities, the G20 can support the faster and more equitable achievement of environmental targets. The people-centred and locally driven approach of JLT can considerably contribute to reducing poverty and enhancing sustainable development in tandem with environmental outcomes.

Establishing just, SLM as the new norm and bridging the gap between levels by creating vertical and horizontal linkages can translate into more targeted solutions, policy-making that benefits the most vulnerable and affected, and more finance flowing to where



it is needed the most. Broader support for the implementation of solutions increases chances for a long-term mindset shift. Supporting local innovation and solutions that are adapted to the local context can increase success rates and long-term adoption of sustainable practices. Furthermore, considering and incorporating traditional knowledge can enhance the effectiveness of solutions and create a greater sense of local ownership.

Increasing and channelling funding more directly to where it is needed the most and reducing transaction / intermediary costs will ensure that larger areas and more affected communities can be supported at a comparatively lower cost supporting global targets for climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation, zero poverty, and food security. Through more direct support and increased land tenure rights, local communities have an incentive to contribute to environmental action because they benefit from their investment into the land.

However, there are trade-offs. Systemic change of this kind requires up-front investment (e.g. for restoration and preservation) and economic structural reform – such as shifting economic models from reliance on large scale industrial production to more decentralized food production, and potentially shifting consumption patterns. This may temporarily increase the prices for some consumers and lead to potential job losses in commercial production. Investing in more sustainable dryland cities (for example through green and blue infrastructure, clean energy, and urban greening) may translate initially to more expensive and longer construction and planning processes and increases in property and land prices, exacerbating inequalities if unaddressed.

The costs of broadening governance systems and ensuring inclusive participation of local levels and more diverse groups of stakeholders can also be considerable and requires working with new (potentially perceived as high risk) partners and institutions, who may or may not have financial management processes and procedures in line with international



best practices. A JLT will require good facilitation, mediation, and communication. Decentralisation and broadening participation will require capacity building and ensuring the availability of the necessary resources and inputs. At the same time, this can considerably increase the sustainability and enhance local capabilities and autonomy in the long-term.

However, short-term changes are offset by major longer-term gains and may be the only way to achieve the nexus of SLM, climate change, and biodiversity in an inclusive, fair and just manner.

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