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Hanns Seidel Foundation

Indo-European Summer Academy

on Non-Traditional Security, 2025

Theme 2025: Energy Security

Working Paper Series 004

A Green Transition Compact: From Local to Global Corridors – Equitable Financing and Policy Pathways for India–EU JET Cooperation

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Title

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Abstract

India and the European Union are at a crossroads in the creation of a just and community focused worldwide energy shift. With net-zero ambitions and booming growth, India grapples with the twin demands of both high-speed development, these risks could strengthen technological, financial and knowledge asymmetries. This memo lays stress on community-first climate communication within the linguistic and cultural contexts, just transition financing and energy justice. This must be locally based engagement to bring high level policy to the ground and create messages that can be heard, trust and enable communities who have been affected to actively influence transition pathways.

The coal-dependent regions of India (Jharia coal belt) and Germany (Ruhr Valley) are used to compare the experiences of the regions and have been used as a reference case study to emphasize the sheer disconnection between high-level negotiations and lived experiences of vulnerable workers, MSMEs and indigenous populations. It claims that the lack of democratised access to technologies, culturally tailored policy frameworks and no-one-left-behind financing architecture would make the India-EU green partnership involve the marginalisation of the most at-risk population categories in the transition without their intention, making it inadvertent.

To deal with these loopholes, this memo will put forward a Green Transition Compact between India and the EU, which is based on the design of policies co-created, trade support of MSMEs and blended finance schemes prioritising inclusion and affordability. The development of capacity and skills should become one of the cornerstones of the transition, since they are crucial to the development of equitable energy infrastructure and to the promotion of regional green industry diversification. This needs strong skills ecosystems, enduring public and social investment, with blended and concessional finance strategically raised to not only de-risk private capital but also spur more capital and confidence in the market in the long term.

Summary

This policy memo builds upon the principles of *energy justice*, *community-first climate communication and no-one-left-behind financing* in the India-EU energy transition discourse. It critically analyses three thematic pillars - Just Transition, Climate Communication and Energy Financing - to propose a "Green Transition Compact 2030". Drawing lessons from Germany's Ruhr Valley coal phase-out and lived realities in India's Jharia coal belt, the memo argues that current top-down policy architectures risk perpetuating technological, financial and cultural asymmetries unless India and the EU invest in co-created policies, cultural localisation and inclusive financing architectures. The memo recommends (i) co-owned technology pilots in India's coal regions, (ii) decentralised climate communication systems that integrate ground-up feedback and (iii) a blended finance architecture that specifically targets vulnerable workers, MSMEs and communities, making climate diplomacy deliver on the ground.

Background

India is simultaneously the world's fastest-growing major economy and the third-largest emitter. Its energy system is heavily reliant on coal (70 percent of electricity generation) but has ambitious renewable energy (RE) goals (500 GW RE capacity by 2030). The EU, committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 under the Green Deal, views India as a key strategic partner under the Clean Energy and Climate Partnership. Yet the structural pathways adopted by Europe, capital-intensive RE systems, low-cost green financing and smart grid digitisation, which are not directly transferable to India's plural, informal economies without substantial support (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2024).

This memo identifies a critical gap often neglected in India-EU energy discourse: the practices of high-level diplomacy (e.g., UNFCCC negotiations, CBAM design) remain linguistically, culturally and technologically distant from the communities whose lives will be fundamentally transformed by the transition.

Thematic Area 1: Just Transition (technology & RE adoption in India-EU context)

A fair transition for the India-EU energy partnership context requires a balanced approach that simultaneously promotes rapid adoption of renewable energy while managing socio-economic disruptions associated with fossil fuel phase-outs and ensures equitable access to clean energy. India's 2070 and EU's 2050 net-zero targets are both committed to deep decarbonisation, yet operate in vastly different developmental, infrastructural and socioeconomic realities. While the EU's current renewable share of final energy consumption is 23 percent (Eurostat, 2024), India's is around 12 percent (MNRE, 2024). However, India is the third-largest solar power producer globally and is scaling rapidly.

On-Ground Nuances: Ruhr Valley (Germany) vs. Jharia Coal Belt (India)

The Ruhr Valley, Germany - Once the largest coal-producing region in Europe, its transition was enabled by decades of structured, state-supported industrial diversification, massive retraining programs and proactive environmental rehabilitation. Between 1960 and 2018, coal mining employment dropped from over 600,000 workers to zero, but GDP per capita in the region remained above the national average due to targeted investment in higher education institutions, cultural industries and clean technology hubs (Oei, Brauers, & Herpich, 2019). Germany is launching a EUR 500 billion infrastructure fund outside its debt brake, with EUR 100 billion for states/municipalities and EUR 400 billion for the federal government over 12 years. Funded through state bonds, it will modernise infrastructure, support R&D, energy transition and climate protection measures and advance carbon neutrality by 2045 (Latham & Watkins, 2025).

The Jharia Coal Belt, Jharkhand, India - In contrast, Jharia is a living example of a lagging transition. As of June 2025, 78.83 MT (Ministry of Coal, 2025) of coal was produced. Jharia remains central to India's energy security, yet suffers from underground fires, severe air pollution and inadequate worker rehabilitation. Over 400,000 people are directly or indirectly dependent on coal mining in the region, but alternative livelihood pathways remain underdeveloped (Sharma and Mehra, 2012). The lack of a long-term regional diversification plan, poor implementation of environmental remediation and absence of skill-mapping have left communities vulnerable to economic displacement (Sabrang India, 2024). In contrast to the Ruhr Valley, Jharia has been experiencing very minuscule integration of renewable energy pilot projects and technological adoption remains limited due to funding limitations, infrastructural bottlenecks and failure of the private sector to participate in the planning of transition.

Comparing Ruhr and Jharia shows that long-term planning, active diversification into knowledge-based and clean technology industries, strong institutional mechanisms for social dialogue and comprehensive environmental restoration are key to a just transition. Ruhr's success lay in its proactive governance and integration of renewable technology production into its industrial salvage, while Jharia is grappling with active mine fires, contamination of land & water and negligible renewable infiltration.

In the wider India-EU trade and technology landscape; market integration, equipment supply chains and critical raw material dependencies help in RE adoption. In 2023, the EU exported around EUR 1.2 billion worth of renewable energy equipment to India-mainly wind turbines and high-efficiency photovoltaic modules-while India exported approximately EUR 200 million (JMK Research, 2024) in solar module components and energy storage

systems to the EU. India's installed renewable capacity currently stands at around 220.10 GW as of 31st March 2025 (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2025), with a national target of 500 GW by 2030, while the EU's installed renewable capacity is approximately 848 GW (Strategic Energy, 2025), dominated by solar and wind. Both states face crunch in critical raw material supply, such as lithium for batteries, underscoring the significance of trade promotion, collaborative R&D investment and circular economy-based recycling systems. This drastic shift from non-renewables to renewables also demands strong cooperation. EU possesses advanced renewable integration and storage technologies and India provides a model of low-cost, high-scale deployment and frugal innovation. However, technology transfer remains hampered by intellectual property concerns, lack of funds for local adaptation and regulatory gaps in standards and certification.

A structured India-EU technology partnership, coordinated R&D centres, bilateral financing frameworks to de-risk renewable projects in coal-reliant regions and retraining of workers inspired by the Ruhr's success, will ensure that the transition is not only technically viable but also socially inclusive. For measuring success tracking the growth of renewables in the energy mix, following the rate of job transitions from fossil fuel to clean energy sectors, assessing community participation in planning, degree of reductions in emissions levels and ensuring diversification and security in raw material supply chains. Only through this holistic approach can the India-EU collaboration deliver a truly just transition that addresses both climate imperatives and socio-economic realities.

Without custom policy design, the shift to renewables in the India-EU partnership risks recreating older patterns of displacement, exclusion and centralised control over energy resources. Technology transfer from the EU to India should go beyond hardware to include co-developed pilots embedded in local ecosystems, where MSMEs, trade unions and panchayats co-own the design, governance and revenue models of clean energy projects. Skill retraining schemes should not merely equip workers for generic RE jobs but align with regional economies-whether retrofitting repair networks, managing decentralised solar operations or developing agrovoltaics systems into existing farming practices.

India's just transition pathway also requires a diversity of renewable energy adoption models that respond to geographic and socio-economic realities: rooftop solar for dense informal settlements where land is scarce; solar-wind hybrid installations for peri-urban industrial belts; and community-owned biogas systems in forested or agro-pastoral regions. The EU's technical and concessional finance architecture must therefore adapt to these plural needs, rather than imposing a uniform digital grid integration pathway that may inadvertently marginalise communities still struggling with basic electrification.

Thematic Area 2: Climate Communication & CBAM - bridging language, power & policy gaps

The India-EU climate cooperation is currently dominated by top-down, technocratic language [Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV), Emissions Trading System (ETS), taxonomy, Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)], operating in English and flooded with policy jargon. Owing to this disconnect between policy and people it undermines acceptance and ownership of the transition.

In spite of the growing sophistication of climate diplomacy and global environmental governance, a pervasive disconnection exists between international policy frameworks, including those negotiated at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the lived realities of communities across the Global Majority like India. Negotiated texts like Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and outcomes from the annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) often are not accessible to communities, MSMEs and local government bodies. These documents are heavy with legal or technical language and are hardly translated into regional idioms or simplified for practical knowledge. Consequently, these individuals' whose lives are most affected by climate extremes, remain mere observers to global policymaking. This disconnection is expressed in the design of climate communication, delivery and operationalisation, resulting in policies that often fail to resonate with or empower the communities they are meant to serve.

One major point of conflict lies in the language difference limiting wide scale awareness and participation in decision making process. The majority of global and national climate policies, documents and compliance mechanisms like the EU's CBAM are available only in English or other UN languages. In India's diverse linguistic geography, this means that small scale entrepreneurs, workers in traditional industries and local government bodies especially in rural areas are effectively excluded from understanding, let alone engaging with, the frameworks determining their economic destinies.

Cultural blind spots further worsen the issue. Policy architectures often overlook Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) systems, community practices, oral histories and cultural idioms that make climate action meaningful and more grounded. Folklore, art and traditional ecological knowledge are unexplored resources in designing effective outreach strategies that could ensure community ownership of the transition process. Without incorporating these features, climate communication will seem foreign and not part of community identity.

Missing feedback loop aggravates these barriers. Existing approaches are still top-down, with decisions made in closed-door negotiations between diplomats, policymakers and corporate representatives. Civil society and grassroots representation are sidelined at the UNFCCC level, limiting their pathways to influence the negotiated texts. Similarly, at the national level, there are limited or no institutionalised mechanisms to ensure that on ground

realities, such as challenges faced by marginalised groups, region specific socio-economic constraints, or emerging community led innovations, are systematically incorporated into the policymaking cycle. This lack of co-creation creates mistrust and reduces the perceived legitimacy of climate policies, making implementation more difficult.

CBAM can be taken as a case study of how climate communication gaps translate into tangible socio-economic risks. Designed to impose a carbon price on imports into the EU from carbon intensive sectors. CBAM is highly technical, legally complex and communicated in English through regulatory and compliance heavy documentation. This creates significant barriers for India's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in hard to abate sectors such as steel, aluminium, cement and textiles, which are deeply integrated into EU value chains. In the absence of accessible communication, targeted capacity building and transition support, these enterprises face the risk of higher compliance costs, reduced competitiveness, or even loss of market access. In many cases, MSMEs are not aware of CBAM's technical requirements, reporting obligations and timelines, leaving them ill-equipped to modify supply chains, adopt low-carbon technologies or access green and concessional finance.

To address these gaps a community first climate communication strategy embedded within the India-EU partnership framework should be developed. This would mean:

- Translating technical policies and compliance guidelines into major regional languages.
- Co-create outreach campaigns that use local art forms, folk storytelling, theatre and community radio to explain complex policy frameworks and laws in culturally resonant ways.
- Institutionalising participatory feedback methods, such as community consultation forums or digital platforms that incorporate lived experiences into the policy cycle.
- Creating specific technical assistance programs targeted at MSMEs, including step-by-step guides, sectoral toolkits and financial access pathways.

Such an approach would reduce the gap between global policy aspirations and local implementation capacity, ensuring that mechanisms and commitments do not simply act as trade barriers but instead catalyse sustainable, inclusive and co-owned transitions in India & EU.

Thematic Area 3: Energy Financing - making transition equitable

The transition to a low-carbon economy is no longer confined by technology or capital; it depends on a form of inclusion: who is included, on what terms and with what protections. Just transition is not about mobilising finance

so much as about organising it in ways that reflect the EU's historical asymmetries, India's socio-economic vulnerabilities and a long history of mistrust.

Recent energy transition financing models give disproportionate weight to large-scale, standardised, investor-based interventions, not grounded in context but in creditworthiness. This universalist model favours bankable projects and asset delivery instead of livelihood continuity. Nonetheless, as the cases of the Ruhr Valley and Jharia point to, transformations are made in specific areas, such as the settlement of workers, coal towns, mining clusters and MSMEs, when financial access and institutional fragility, land rights and land ownership conflicts and financial access and the lived insecurity of communities in the economic turmoil zone interact. The lack of specific or custom-made financing tools means these communities will be mere consumers or worse still victims of a transition that was not made by them.

The India-EU partnership must therefore move beyond financing only physical infrastructure such as solar parks, transmission lines and battery plants, towards financing the *conditions for participation.* This requires embedding inclusion into the financial systems themselves, not as an afterthought, but as a foundational design principle. Public, concessional and blended capital must be structured to enable direct access for low-income communities and informal actors, or at least be able to be channelled through trusted intermediaries such as producer cooperatives, district development agencies, self-help groups, or municipal-level transition funds.

Access must also be *purpose-built*. Rather than forcing communities to adapt to centralised, often bureaucratic, climate finance mechanisms, a modular, ecosystem-based approach can deliver tailored solutions, integrating clean mobility, clean cooking, decentralised energy access, housing retrofits and climate-resilient livelihoods. Financial instruments could range from micro-grants for the adoption of clean cooking to climate-linked credit guarantees for women-led green enterprises, to pooled risk-sharing facilities that underwrite green skilling programmes and employment diversification in coal-dependent regions.

The R&D would have to be integrated into the financing packages- not as its own separate line but as the source of localised innovation.

More importantly, climate finance should be well-defined. The lack of a unified definition of climate finance and the absence of consensus on measurement procedures erode credibility and performance. The lack of clarity makes it hard to track progress, add value, or hold contributors accountable, undermining trust in investments and the quality of the negotiation process.

Funding, however well planned will be a failure unless state governments, local government bodies and local institutions have the capacity to absorb, plan, implement and oversee transition projects. Sector-specific preparedness, i.e. RE project authorisation in coastal states, decarbonisation of industry in manufacturing centres, water-energy nexus control in arid areas, has to be embedded into the financing packages.

The high capital cost, less concessionality and slow capital disbursement should be eliminated using balance sheet optimisation, capital expansion and SDR re-channelling.

It is also important to note that finance has to extend beyond the creation of assets to finance trust, continuity and capability. It is not the number of solar microgrids installed or the number of electric buses purchased that matters. The real test of just transition finance is whether vulnerable groups will be able to maintain, adapt and benefit long-term through these assets. This requires long term patient capital and systems of governance that can redress the voices of the community, protect their rights and make sure that benefits are distributed equitably among the genders, caste and income groups.

In this regard, the proposed India-EU Green Transition Compact offers the opportunity to establish an alternative paradigm of international climate financing, with a focus on derisking participation rather than capital and on scaling legitimacy and trust rather than physical assets. The model would not be based on one-way transfers or strict conditionalities, but on co-created, decentralised financial architectures, which can operate in federal, plural and informal economies. Provided to be effective in India, this might be modified and not as a blueprint but as a demonstration that is replicable in other transition economies like South Africa, Indonesia and Brazil.

With the global climate finance increasingly fractured and decoupled, at least in a real sense, with the low-carbon future being constructed around them, the India-EU partnership has an opportunity to reinvent the concept of bankability: not merely the capacity to service debt, but the capability of communities to own, shape and prosper within the low-carbon future being assembled around them.

India-EU Green Transition Compact needs to resimilarise the vision of financing as not only capital mobilisation, but an architecture of democratising access, protecting community rights and de-risking the private participation of socially transformative projects. The green and sustainable debt market in India has already exceeded USD 55.9 billion and more than 83 percent of the issuances are green bonds, yet the possibilities of blue and hybrid do not have a proper start yet (Sharma, 2024). The sovereign green bonds have provided pricing reference points, though the lack of an established greenium and the cancellation of a 30-year auction by the RBI in 2025 indicate weak demand and the need for more investable pipelines.

Under a base case, in 2030, blue bonds, a key element of resilience to coastlines, water security, livelihood regeneration, would be USD 10-15 billion, including 0.15-0.2 per cent of annual GDP via fisheries productivity, prevented disaster costs and tourism of the environment (Sharma, 2024a). With powerful regulation, sovereign guarantees and a specialized Blue Project Preparation Facility, issuance may rise to USD 30-40 billion, which can create a 0.45 per cent GDP boost and INR 15-20,000 crore in aggregate fiscal savings (Sharma, 2024b). To achieve fair and balanced energy infrastructure, robust skilling ecosystems and green-industrial regionalisation, blended and concessional finance should be employed in a hopeful manner in a bid to crowdfund and socialise investment and de-risk private wealth investment.

In the absence of these safeguards, the India-EU association will play into the hands of the asymmetries it aims to remove. It can lead by example with models of climate finance that define the key ability of communities to prosper in, shape and maintain the low-carbon transition as bankability.

Recommendations

This memo encourages India and the EU to realign their climate and energy relationship through community based, equity focused models that reconcile technological aspirations with social equity. To do so, the following strategic recommendations may be offered:

1. Repackage Just Transition as a joint venture: The cooperation between India and EU should focus on the context-sensitive adoption of renewable energy as opposed to the one-size-fits-all approach. It implies scaling the diversified RE systems-rooftop solar to dense informal housing, solar-wind hybrids to peri-urban belts and bio-gas in forested communities and facilitated by skill retraining programs specific to the local economies (e.g., agrovoltaics, repair and retrofitting networks). EU technology transfer has to shift to co-created pilot models where MSMEs, trade unions and panchayats have a co-ownership of the design and revenue models of the clean energy projects. This will avoid the repetition of displacement and facilitate a fair distribution of green growth benefits.

2. Communicate Community-First Climate: To overcome the divide between the global negotiation and the realities on the ground, a bottom-up, multilingual and culturally contextualised climate communication approach is necessary. EU-India platforms need to invest in the translation of technical policy documents (including ETS, CBAM, MRV and taxonomy frameworks) into local languages and incorporate Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK), art, folklore and storytelling to create energy transitions that have significance to citizens. CBAM and mechanisms as such should be supplemented through various MSMEs and introduction of a formal feedback loop

should be put in place, in gram sabhas in India, as well as in EU civil society councils, which would work on two-way accountability.

3. Design Fair Energy Finance Architecture: Concessional and blended finance should be used to mobilise and subsidise private capital, as well as to support public and social investment in fair and equitable energy infrastructure. Priority should be given to financing the diversification of the green industries in the regions, skilling of the workers in the areas of transition, such as Jharia and social protection to be provided to the displaced workers. India-EU financial partnership must not just focus on large utility-scale RE ventures but also on smaller micro-grids, decentralised storage and community-owned ventures; sections of the populace that are marginalised. Both parties must use institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the National Bank of India in Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) to jointly come up with customised credit lines to MSMEs, cooperatives and rural energy entrepreneurs.

4. Embed Trade and Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) in Transition Strategy: The transition from fossil to renewable energy systems hinges not only on technology adoption but also on secure, just and transparent trade in CRMs such as lithium, cobalt and rare earths. India-EU cooperation must therefore couple renewable energy deployment with responsible supply chain agreements, recycling ecosystems and joint research on substitutes, while ensuring that sourcing does not externalise socio-environmental harm to vulnerable communities in the Global South.

5. Build Joint Transition Learning Platforms: Drawing on comparative lessons from the Ruhr Valley in Germany and Jharia in India, a dedicated India-EU Just Transition Learning Hub should be established. This hub could track transition metrics (jobs retrained, regions diversified, households electrified), commission joint academic studies and provide a repository of case-based learning to ensure that transition pathways remain adaptive and inclusive.

Conclusion

There is a crossroad in the India-EU partnership on climate and energy transition. The two regions have been pressured to speed up the decarbonisation process and at the same time, not leave behind any worker, community or small enterprise. However, without a policy oriented towards inclusiveness, there is even a danger that the transition to renewables will not replace older forms of displacement and inequality but will only reinforce them.

The joint venture will need to be redesigned as a collaborative ecosystem instead of a donor pipeline. This implies entrenching technology transfer into local governance systems, making financing models resilient to community and reconsidering climate communications models in such a way that global diplomacy is converted into direct benefits for the most vulnerable people. CBAM, MRV schemes, or digital grid integration policies should be followed by culturally-grounded, multilingual and active processes, which can give a chance to obtain real feedback regarding grassroots realities.

Finally, a fair-minded India-EU energy partnership should be beyond a capital and technology exchange. It should be a mutual agreement - one that builds on both the technical capacity and the mass of transition requirements in Europe with India to come up with plural, decentralised and socially fair energy futures. It is only through instilling equity, local agency and community understanding into the core of the transition that both partners can show that climate ambition can be consistent with justice, which serves as a model to both the Global South & North.

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