

Governing a fair energy transition in coal-dependant areas

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Prof Yiannis Bakouros, provides a comprehensive exploration of promoting inclusive regional governance for a fair energy transition in coal-dependent areas

In the global effort to create a fair and sustainable future, it's imperative to help regions that depend on coal switch to cleaner energy sources. **The SITRANS (Governance and Social Impact of Coal Regions under Transition) project financed by the EU** looks at how local governments can be supported to make this transition fair for everyone. We're focusing on places where coal is a big deal and trying to explain the shift clearly and easily. University of Western Macedonia, Greece, is the leader of this project, and related organisations from Poland, Bulgaria, and Italy are the main partners.

Understanding coal-dependent areas

Coal-dependent areas have been essential for making energy, powering communities, and driving economic activities for a long time. But because of the environmental problems linked to coal, we need to move towards cleaner energy sources. This change

is necessary, but comes with challenges like potential job losses, economic changes, and community disruptions.

Switching to cleaner energy: Make governance more inclusive

This study highlights how important it is for regional governance to include everyone in decisions about switching to cleaner energy. It's about ensuring all voices are heard, especially from different communities. This inclusive approach is key to ensuring the energy shift is fair. In Europe, there are significant challenges around energy, like climate change, keeping energy supplies secure, ensuring people accept the changes, staying competitive, and ensuring everyone can afford energy.

Moving to cleaner energy and economies with net zero carbon emissions is complicated. It needs much public support, new ways of doing business, and different ways of governing. Places that rely on coal are particularly affected because switching to cleaner energy could significantly affect towns, businesses and jobs.

The SITRANS project examines these challenges by studying how the energy switch affects regions economically and socially. It's also working on a better way of governing to ensure the transition is fair, focusing on local needs. Checking if they're working is essential since plans for a fair transition are so big. SITRANS is creating a place called the Just Energy Transition Observatory. It'll ensure that plans and investments are checked properly using specific measures and rules. This makes sure the assessments are fair and trustworthy.

Getting communities involved and stronger

Inclusive governance starts by getting local communities really involved and empowered. This means giving them all the information they need about the energy switch, their choices, and what it means for them. When communities understand what's going on, they can make better decisions and be more involved in the changes happening around them.

Collaboration among stakeholders

Changing to cleaner energy requires everyone to work together – governments, businesses, environmental groups, and local people. Inclusive regional governance means everyone talks openly and works together to deal with the challenges of switching to cleaner energy.

Helping people learn new skills and find new jobs

Because many jobs might disappear in places that rely on coal, inclusive governance focuses on helping people learn new skills and find new jobs. This means investing in training and education so communities can learn skills useful in new industries. This helps make the switch to a more sustainable economy easier for everyone.

Ensuring resources are shared fairly

Inclusive governance ensures that the money and resources used for the energy switch are shared fairly among the affected areas. This means investing in things like roads, schools, and healthcare to lessen the impact of the switch on local communities.

Bringing communities together

Inclusive governance brings communities together by involving them in decisions. This strengthens communities and helps people trust the changes around them, making it easier to switch to cleaner energy.

Making local economies stronger

By investing in new jobs and industries, inclusive governance helps places that rely on coal become stronger economically. This means these areas can do well even after coal is no longer a big part of their economy.

Ensuring everyone is treated fairly

Inclusive governance ensures that pollution's harmful effects and the good things about switching to cleaner energy are spread out evenly. This helps ensure everyone, especially marginalised groups, is treated fairly.

Addressing job losses

One big problem with moving away from coal in certain areas is that many people might lose their jobs. Inclusive governance tackles this issue by focusing on creating programmes to help people find new jobs. These programmes teach new skills and help create new job opportunities, so the community can keep making money.

Fair policy-making

Inclusive governance is important for making sure that the rules about switching to cleaner energy are fair for everyone. This means talking with everyone involved to understand what each community needs. By considering the different situations in coal-dependent areas, inclusive governance helps prevent unintended problems and makes the switch smoother.

Building better infrastructure

Switching from coal to cleaner energy needs good infrastructure to support it. Inclusive governance uses resources to build things like wind farms, better roads, and stronger community buildings. This speeds up the energy switch and helps make these areas more sustainable and resilient in the long run.

Learning from others

Working together internationally can help regions learn from each other's experiences with the energy switch. By sharing what works and what doesn't, places that rely on coal can develop better plans.

Getting financial help

When countries work together, they can attract money from other places to help with inclusive governance projects. This money can be used to build infrastructure, train people, and support new industries in coal-dependent regions.

Making policies work together

International cooperation helps ensure that policies about the energy switch match up worldwide. This creates a suitable environment for a fair energy switch and helps fight climate change on a global scale.

Conclusion: Towards a fair energy transition

The journey towards a fair energy transition in coal-dependent areas necessitates a comprehensive and inclusive approach to governance. By actively involving communities, collaborating with diverse stakeholders, and addressing the socio-economic challenges associated with the transition, inclusive governance emerges as a pivotal force for ensuring the success and sustainability of the transition.

As we navigate the complex path toward cleaner energy, let us ensure that no community is left behind and all share the benefits of a greener future. By embracing inclusive regional governance, we can establish the groundwork for a fair and just energy transition that has a lasting positive effect on the environment and the communities it aims to uplift.

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