

Energy Justice Policy Brief

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As a response to the threats of climate change, ambitious goals for reducing carbon emissions require the rapid and extensive deployment of low energy technologies throughout the economy. This will involve fuelling current energy systems, but above all the creation of new supply chains, technologies and multiple impacts, with far-reaching implications for infrastructures, institutions, social practices and cultural norms. The resultant material and social transformations this focus causes are imbued with contestations over what is *just*, *equitable*, and *right*, demanding awareness about the interlinkages between energy and social justice.

Through the transformation of our energy systems old injustices could be reinforced, whilst new incarnations emerge if we continue to ignore the ethical implications of our policy and investment decisions. This includes failures to appreciate the burdens of having too much energy, including waste, over-consumption and pollution, or from not having enough, where some individuals lack access, are challenged by under-consumption and poverty, and may face health burdens and shortened lives as a consequence of restricted energy choices¹.

Amidst the climate change challenge and resultant energy systems transformations, the energy justice concept has emerged with an aim to provide all individuals, across all areas, with safe, affordable and sustainable energy. It evaluates (a) where injustices emerge, (b) which affected sections of society are ignored, and (c) which processes exist for their remediation in order to (i) reveal, and (ii) reduce such injustices². It identifies that it is within the overarching process of sociotechnical change that issues of energy justice emerge, where inattention to social justice issues can cause injustices, or via their inclusion can provide a means to solve them.

Sovacool *et al.*¹ offer one approach to responsibility for ethical outcomes when they state that ‘an important dimension to justice goes beyond concepts and analysis to decisions and thus decision-making, including policy-makers and regulators as well as ordinary students, jurists, homeowners, businesspersons, investors, and consumers’. This highlights that we *all* bear the burden of creating energy justice, even when we make the most mundane energy choices such as turning on a light switch. Further, Heffron and McCauley³ add that ‘justice is concerned with social responsibility by the private sector, the government and the public. The choices that they make will have a significant impact upon both global climate change, and in particular, inter-generational justice’. Neither statement, however, engages with the power differentials in each group, their awareness of the challenges, or their range of capabilities.

Thus, there are two overarching challenges. The first is to further investigate the justice implications of energy systems transformations in the face of climate change agendas; the second challenge is to identify who is responsible for them as we not only mitigate the impacts of climate change via socio-technical change, but do so in an ethically defensible, socially just, way.

¹ Sovacool BK, Heffron RJ, McCauley D and Goldthau A (2016) ‘Energy decisions reframed as justice and ethical concerns’. *Nature Energy* 1: 1-6; pg. 1

² Jenkins K, McCauley D, Heffron R J, Stephan H and Rehner R (2016a) ‘Energy justice: A conceptual review’, *Energy Research and Social Science* 11: 174-182

³ Heffron RJ and McCauley D (2014) ‘Achieving sustainable supply chains through energy justice’, *Applied Energy* 123: 435-437