YES TO RENEWABLES DONE RIGHT!

Energy as a common good

Energy sufficiency for all

Finance for the energy revolution

System change! Power to the people now!

100% renewable energy for all

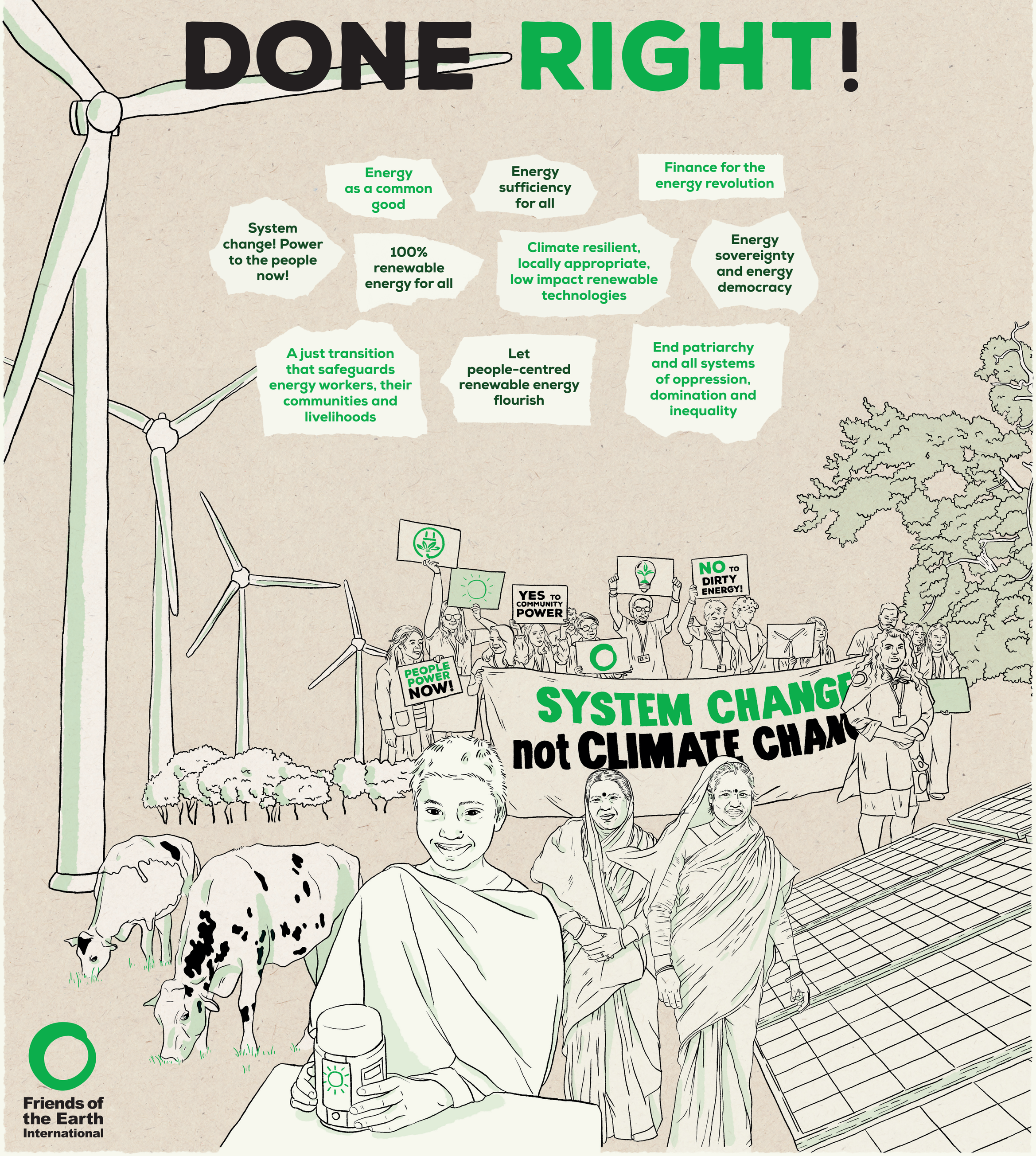
Climate resilient, locally appropriate, low impact renewable technologies

Energy sovereignty and energy democracy

A just transition that safeguards energy workers, their communities and livelihoods

Let people-centred renewable energy flourish

End patriarchy and all systems of oppression, domination and inequality



Friends of the Earth International

YES TO RENEWABLES DONE RIGHT!

Tackling challenges for scaling up just transitions in the Global South

Friends of the Earth International

INVESTING IN CIRCULAR SYSTEMS

Scaling up renewable energy requires circular systems as the foundation of thriving local industries. This should be centred around the sustainable manufacture, reuse and recycling of renewable energy products emphasising localised supply chains.

For resource rich communities, investment in local and responsible manufacturing can support thriving industries with skilled employment for young people. However, currently materials are extracted from Global South communities and minimally processed before they are exported. A circular approach requires products and components to be designed so they can be disassembled, repaired, reused and recycled, reducing the overall amount of virgin materials needed to manufacture new products and decreasing the socio-environmental impacts along the product lifecycle. It also provides alternative economies centred around repair and re-manufacture.

"We need to rethink the renewables value chain to centre justice, equity and participation in a new energy system. This looks like considering reused materials supply, community decentralised ownership, and zero waste."

- Yegeshni Moodley
groundWork / FoE South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Friends of the Earth International has a vision for transformative scaled up renewable energy for all, to tackle the climate crisis and to meet the energy needs of those who suffer energy poverty.[1] But renewable energy models must not replicate our current extractive, corporate and broken energy system. The urgency to deliver climate action can lead to renewables projects that replicate the problems of fossil energy - land grabbing, human rights violations and environmental destruction. Communities, mainly in the Global South, that host renewable energy developments or provide 'transition mineral' resources for renewables are sacrificed for these projects.

We cannot simply substitute renewables for fossil fuels. We need system change, transformation away from corporate extractivism and towards energy produced for and by the people.

We recognise that large scale renewables will be needed, but these must follow the principles of Renewables Done Right.[2] Community-based renewable energy projects are often dismissed as being too small scale to meet the challenge of the energy and climate crisis - but the power of replication as scaling up must not be underestimated.

The transition to renewable energy has the potential to transform people's lives by ensuring sufficient access to sustainable clean energy services which support thriving local economies while protecting and regenerating local environments. Here we present some cases and reflections on the topic of Renewables Done Right to better understand the needs for a just, people-centred scaling up of renewables.

ENERGY SUFFICIENCY FOR ALL

SCOTLAND

Somewhere between the extremes of excessive energy use and energy poverty lies 'energy sufficiency'. For many people around the world, lack of energy to meet their needs is a central problem, whereas at the other extreme, energy is used excessively and wastefully.

Until 2008, people on the Isle of Eigg in Scotland did not have access to grid electricity. The island community was eventually able to secure funding, however, to install a stand-alone mini-grid and local generation capacity. A combination of small wind, small hydro and solar photovoltaics now provide a reliable 24-hour energy supply to the community. To keep the capital cost to a minimum and to avoid spikes in consumption in this closed system, the community implemented a 5 kW consumption cap for households. Ultimately, people adapted their behaviour to live comfortably with a sufficient amount of power.[5]

⊞ Delivering energy access without considering energy sufficiency is likely to lead to changes in energy culture that promote excessive consumption. People have a right to sufficient energy for a 'good life' not just for basic needs, but we must also address overconsumption in the Global North and among elites everywhere.

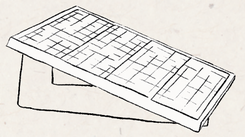
RESPECTING LAND RIGHTS & COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

INDIA

In India, while the Rewa Ultra Mega Solar project has added significant energy generation capacity for the country, it has left local communities desperate:

"The Project has neither given us any power, nor any source of employment. People are forced to migrate elsewhere in search of jobs. The situation is alarming here."

The Rewa project has been fully operational since 2020 and involves huge installations of solar panels, some of which surround villages entirely. As a result, local communities have been cut off from the land, disrupting their lives and livelihoods. They also haven't experienced the benefits of employment or energy access as promised by the project developers.[3]



⊞ For a truly just transition, local communities must be involved in planning, implementation and ownership of energy projects. Governments must also carefully consider the seasonal land (and water) use patterns of local communities and landless groups such as pastoralists. These considerations should be sensitive to intersectional differences related to gender and socio-cultural norms and practices.

ENSURING INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS

PALESTINE

The Palestinian energy sector faces several challenges including an unstable political environment, poor economic conditions, a heavy dependence on imported fuel and electricity from Israel and the grid and distribution challenges brought on by the occupation.

This has resulted in energy insecurity and instability and unreliable electricity supply with frequent disruptions, affecting the daily life and livelihoods of the Palestinian People.

Palestine, however, is blessed with ample renewable energy sources, especially solar. But the grid system in the West Bank is fragmented and there is no high voltage grid, which hinders any increase of electricity load and restricts its potential to accept more electricity from other sources, including renewables.

The capacity of the electricity transfer and distribution systems need to be upgraded, storage options need to be developed and high voltage lines that can accept additional load need to be built.[6]

⊞ Renewable energy projects must ensure sufficient access for communities for example by connecting households and installing or upgrading local distribution networks. In Palestine, lack of energy access is a tool of occupation. In other cases, communities in the Global South are limited to hosting projects, experiencing the impacts but not sharing in the benefits of renewables.

MATERIALS FOR RENEWABLES & PEOPLES' RIGHTS

ARGENTINA

Argentina is part of the renowned 'Lithium triangle', an area of South America which holds uph 68% of the world's lithium reserves. This increasingly sought after metal is an essential component of alternatives to fossil fuels, used in batteries for electric vehicles and energy storage systems.

Most of Argentina's lithium reserves are being exported to advance the energy transition agendas of countries in the Global North. The communities on the frontlines are left to deal with the brutal realities of the resulting land encroachment, human rights violations and more, and reap no energy benefits from the extraction. In the Catamarca province, the Tres Quebradas lithium project has led to water scarcity, wildlife deaths, income losses, community conflicts, and unjust suffering from energy poverty.

Local people have to compete with transnational corporations for access to the land and water they have relied on for generations, while receiving no compensation or access to renewable energy.[4]

⊞ Robust local environmental regulations, coming from participatory decision-making with communities and shared respect for their rights, are needed to ensure renewables are done right. New models of shared ownership and shared benefits for communities from renewables should be rolled out, with an absolute minimum financial benefit sharing. All phrojects must implement genuine Free, Prior and Informed Consent processes which also means communities can say NO.

CONCLUSION

We need a complete overhaul of the energy system – from viewing energy as a commodity and denying the right to energy for all, to a just transition towards renewable energy based on democratic, public and community control and ownership, and sufficiency. Central to this scaling up of renewables and just transition is the need for equity and justice, particularly for those in the Global South and especially for those least responsible for, but most impacted by, climate change.

A scaling of renewables for a just transition requires system change - a new model of environmental, social, political, economic and gender justice. We are building the power of the peoples toward this and will continue the struggle for climate justice and a system that promotes reciprocity, redistribution and sharing, addressing individual and collective needs.

REFERENCES

1 Friends of the Earth International 2018, People Power Now Manifesto.
2 APMDD 2024, Ten Principles for the Rapid, Equitable, and Just Transition to Renewable Energy Systems.
3-4 Friends of the Earth International 2023, Renewable energy and land use: barriers to just transition in the Global South.
5 Bhattacharyya, S. Analysis of off-grid electricity system at Isle of Eigg (Scotland): Lessons for developing countries.
6 Technical Assessment Study on Challenges and Constraints to Renewable Energy Transition in West Bank, July 2024 Dr. Ayman Rabi.

Lead Authors: Sara Shaw, Dr Anne Schiffer. **Editor:** Ghislaine Fandel. **Contributors:** Natalia Salvatico, Maria Mercedes Gould and Giuliana Alderete, Tierra Nativa/Friends of the Earth Argentina, Abeer Al Butmah, Dr Ayman Rabi Friends of the Earth Palestine/PENGON Himanshu Damle, Rajesh Kumar, Ayaz Ahamad, Friends of the Earth India, Yegeshni Moodley groundWork / Friends of the Earth South Africa. **Design:** Zelda Mauger. **Translation:** Spanish by REDES / Friends of the Earth Uruguay. French by Gregoire Seither.

Friends of the Earth International