



THE ROLE OF ENERGY NETWORKS TOWARDS  
THE 2035 EMISSIONS TARGET  
POLICY PAPER SERIES

## A Just Transition to Net-Zero

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## Policy Brief: A Just Transition to Net-Zero Supergen Energy Networks Hub

### Overview

- Taking a socially conscious view to transition that takes into consideration impacts on people and communities, ensuring a fair and just transition to net-zero at local, national and international level.
- Ensuring articulation around inclusivity and democratic approaches to engagement, particularly when involving systemically hindered communities including low-income and vulnerable households.
- Growing the diversity of the energy networks community, in terms of disciplinary as well as involving individuals who fall under protected characteristics.

As the energy sector moves away from using fossil fuels, networks are being integrated into interdependent multi- vector energy systems to achieve the government target of 78% emissions reduction by 2035 and net-zero by 2050.

In making the changes to more carbon neutral energy sources, including wind and solar, it is important to ensure communities currently living in fuel poverty are not left behind.

The recent workshop hosted by the Black South West Network (BSWN), in collaboration with the Supergen Energy Networks Hub (SEN), discussed how the UK Governments recently announced decarbonisation targets could be achieved throughout society, ensuring a fair and just transition to net-zero. In achieving this a socio-technical approach as well as consideration to integrate all energy networks, including Gas, Heat, Electricity and Transport etc will be important.

The policy brief summaries the challenges and thoughts of the diverse group of participants attending the workshop and looks at any further questions which should be considered moving forward<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. An Inclusive and Accessible Message: How can we better enable voices from underrepresented communities to engage with the sustainable energy discussion?

<p><b>Barriers &amp; Challenges</b></p>	<p>Educating society about the energy market, in regards to environmental issues, related technical knowledge, sustainable energy discussions, etc should be accessible and available to all. Without access to education, inequalities are more evident, vulnerable communities are more disadvantaged and consequently living in poor conditions.</p>
<p><b>Unseen or Unintended Consequences</b></p>	<p>Access to education can hinder discussions on sustainable energy debates as these discussions are often too academic, technical or generally inaccessible.</p> <p>The unintended consequences of this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low-income and vulnerable families not being informed nor prepared to negotiate energy deals and often paying more than they should or ending up in debt.</li> <li>- Disadvantaged communities being unable to join energy networks and decision- making spaces and contribute significantly to the discussion.</li> </ul> <p>Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds becoming 'uninterested' in science education from an early age and not having space to develop the knowledge and skills to be part of the discussion.</p>
<p><b>Opportunities &amp; Solutions</b></p>	<p>There are opportunities to shift the current message delivery to a more inclusive model, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating kinesthetic learning activities on environmental science in community spaces that disadvantaged children, young people and adults can access easily. Practical learning activities in a safe and familiar space also put learners in a more comfortable space to ask questions.</li> <li>- Funding community organisations to deliver the message to their communities through a more inclusive selection of language, terminology, and channels for delivery.</li> <li>- Always ensuring that the discussion is articulated to be directly relevant to the individuals rather than framing it around altruistic action, i.e. building a bigger picture that easily and clearly relates to individuals is easier to understand and makes people feel part of both the problem and solutions.</li> </ul>

## 2. Shifting the Power Imbalance: What are the barriers hindering these communities' engagement with leading environmental institutions such as the Supergen hub?

<p><b>Barriers &amp; Challenges</b></p>	<p>Access to Education can lead to a broader issue of power-imbalance where the burden of environmental impact is often placed on individuals rather than on big corporations and institutions who truly have the power, capital, and capacity to make a significant change.</p>
<p><b>Unseen or Unintended Consequences</b></p>	<p>The unseen consequences of this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Responsibility on the individual to change the energy provider every year to be able to stay on a lower cost contract.</li> <li>- Responsibility on the individual to find and pay for the advice and updated information to navigate energy markets.</li> <li>- Vulnerable groups paying the green policies costs on their bills independently of their income, energy consumption levels or methods of payment.</li> </ul> <p>Privileged societies being able to benefit from the positive outcomes of green policies as they have financial capacity to buy new green technology whilst less privileged communities are unable to benefit.</p>
<p><b>Opportunities &amp; Solutions</b></p>	<p>To tackle these challenges, an easy and linear system that frees individuals from anxieties around being able to afford basic necessities could be designed. An easier system would then enable people to have thinking space and capacity for engaging and for contributing to the wider discussion.</p> <p>A redistribution of resources where the capital shifts from wealthy spaces to underprivileged communities is needed. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A reclassification of government pots for decarbonisation (currently 85% goes to supporting renewable energy projects, 15% goes to demand-side management and no funding is specifically targeting fuel poverty).</li> <li>- Moving green technology costs on taxation rather than on bills.</li> <li>- Building more flexibility and easier communication into the system to have a feedback loop that is more agile for change.</li> </ul> <p>Hence, when the unintended consequences start to present themselves, they are immediately identified and tackled with co-produced solutions.</p>

### 3. Barriers Facing Community Energy Networks and Individuals: What are the unseen/unintended consequences of changes to energy networks which should be considered?

<p><b>Barriers &amp; Challenges</b></p>	<p>Through education it is realised that the role of community energy networks becomes crucial in ensuring that the community can effectively engage with the sustainable energy discussion.</p>
<p><b>Unseen or Unintended Consequences</b></p>	<p>Energy policies change too fast for community networks to secure the resources, funding and time to plan and deliver a long-term program that would significantly impact communities and potentially offer new proven models to achieve socially conscious and sustainable energy.</p> <p>Systemically hindered communities are extremely diverse. Even when focusing only on one protected characteristic, e.g. ethnicity, there are hundreds of different communities and individuals within that category who will have different levels of understanding around environmental issues, different cultural customs and approaches to energy consumption, different housing conditions (e.g. certain communities tend to live in overcrowded conditions more than others, which will impact their energy consumption.)</p>
<p><b>Opportunities &amp; Solutions</b></p>	<p>Community energy networks and community organisations should be properly resourced to provide support and advice around energy markets, prices and the wider discussion on environmental impact.</p> <p>The broad diversity of people struggling with fuel poverty calls for a diversified approach where the message is communicated in a tailored way to different groups.</p>

## 4. Conclusions and Next Steps

<p><b>Barriers &amp; Challenges</b></p>	<p>Participants ultimately agreed that an action plan which encompasses a robust and multi- disciplinary business case to gain the buy-in of national authorities and the COP26 international audience is needed.</p>
<p><b>Unseen or Unintended Consequences</b></p>	<p>There are elements to take into account to avoid unintended consequences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Framing it around the SDGs<sup>2</sup> will be in line with most of the COP26 audience’s commitments.</li> </ul> <p>It is important to consider how working towards SDG7<sup>2</sup> requires different approaches in different countries. We should consider in some countries the priority is to build the energy grid, whilst in other countries it is making sure that everyone connected to the grid can afford the energy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are multiple levels of representation that go beyond socio-economic statuses, e.g. gender and racial structural inequality works in tandem with socio- economic disadvantage creating additional layers of exclusion.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities &amp; Solutions</b></p>	<p>In addition to that considered above, the plan will need to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How to achieve a significant power-shifting in decision-making within the energy system to allow for true equitable representation; for those underrepresented voices to contribute and bring meaningful innovation and change.</li> <li>- Avoiding “singular” thinking and framing our policy goals against the SDG framework to build a compelling argument that working on fuel poverty is inherently part of “Building Back Better” and moving towards SDG7. The argument can be articulated around the impact on health costs, especially in a post-pandemic context where healthcare inequalities have been exacerbated.</li> <li>- The role of local politicians and local authority in “stirring the direction” and ensuring that the right people are at the right tables.</li> </ul> <p>Lobbying national government and ensuring appropriate resources are available.</p>

## 5. Future Considerations:

Data shows that households from ethnic minorities have a higher likelihood of being in fuel poverty. One of the key reasons is that the median income for ethnic minority households was/is on average, lower than the income for white households. In addition, ethnic minorities also tend to have a higher proportion living in social housing (27% compared to 16% for white households) and tend to live in more energy efficient properties with a median energy efficiency rating of 69 compared to 67 for white households which may explain their lower average gap.

Bristol's City Leap aims to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality by 2030 for the city of Bristol. After declaring climate emergency, the city calculated the scale of resources needed to achieve the goal. It works through a partnership between the energy sector and the city. It aims to include the community energy dimension

## References:

<sup>1</sup> Workshop Attendees: Sado Jirde (Director BSWN), Chiara Lodi (Policy and Research BSWN), Phil Taylor (Director SEN), Lindsey Allen (Project Coordinator SEN), Peter Taylor, Associate Director SEN), Furong Li (Associate Director SEN), Linda Ward (Project Coordinator SEN), Kye Gbangbola (Founder, Total eco Management Ltd), Nicola Beech (Cabinet Member, responsibility for Climate, Ecology, Waste and Energy), Zoe Banks (Sustainable Neighbourhood Programme Manager KWMC), Oluwa Shittu (Founder Play Wooden CIC), Peter Smith (Director of Policy and Research, National Energy Action), Sibusiso Tshabalala (Founder, Cognitive Paths), Abdullahi Farah (Director, Bristol Somali Resource Centre), Olivia Sweeney (Black and Green Ambassador), Manu Maunganidze (Education and Engagement Lead, Global Goals Centre)

<sup>2</sup> The 17 Sustainable Development Goals: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

<sup>3</sup> Fuel stats for England [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/966509/Annual\\_Fuel\\_Poverty\\_Statistics\\_LILEE\\_Report\\_2021\\_2019\\_data\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966509/Annual_Fuel_Poverty_Statistics_LILEE_Report_2021_2019_data_.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ethnicity Facts and Figures collection published by the Cabinet Office: <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/>.

<sup>5</sup> Report on SD7 <https://sdgs.un.org/news/proposed-global-roadmap-shows-how-universal-access-sustainable-energy-can-be-achieved-2030>.