

Is South Africa on track in terms of its Green Economy Recovery objectives?

South Africa's post COVID economic recovery plan came under the spotlight yesterday during the launch of a Green Economy Tracker which benchmarks the country's policies against other national efforts to transition to a fair, green economy.

Whilst recovery is starting to get underway in South Africa, the Green Economy Tracker shows that there are strong policies supporting Green Economy Recovery efforts, but that these lack clear implementation targets. Evidence shows that policy implementation needs work. South Africa's post-COVID recovery plan, the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), does have a clear aim to inclusively decarbonize the economy.

This emerged during discussions yesterday at a webinar organized by Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) in collaboration with the Green Economy Coalition (GEC) which focused on "Unpacking South Africa's Road to Building Back Better, Fairer and Greener." This webinar set the scene for a new, unfolding discussion around South Africa's recovery efforts from the perspective of an inclusive green economy.

This event, the first of a series of four dialogues, was opened by representatives from both the European Union Delegation to South Africa and the Green Economy Coalition (GEC). Stuart Worsley, GEC Countries Programme Director noted that COVID had highlighted social fragility, economic strain and the consequences of ignoring our environment. The pandemic deepened poverty, inequality and unemployment, and governments everywhere had enacted measures to lessen pandemic impact. At the same time, calls for a "better, fairer and greener" recovery had led many governments to commit to sustainability through a green economy.

European Union representative in South Africa, Lidia Afonso Gallegos highlighted how the core goal of international assistance has shifted over the years to the point where there is a realization that addressing climate change cannot be done in isolation of addressing inequality and poverty. Both stressed that green recovery efforts and a just transition to an inclusive green and inclusive economy offer an opportunity to develop and implement a shared vision of resilience and sustainability.

GEC Economic Policy Lead Chris Hopkins demonstrated the Green Economy Tracker which was developed in collaboration with TIPS and GEC members around the world. The Tracker shows South Africa's policies benchmarked against other national efforts to transition to a fair, green economy. The Tracker is the first of its kind and currently covers 32 countries. Nine more are in the pipeline. It tracks post COVID recovery and other key policies in ways that are transparent, and invites input from citizens.



TIPS researcher Elize Hattingh went on to highlight where South Africa currently sits in comparison to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Hattingh pointed out that there are some promising areas but there are opportunities for South Africa to grow in terms of its focus on a green and sustainable recovery post COVID-19. Where South Africa was doing well, she indicated, was in relation to its pro-poor policies and an increasing percentage of R&D was going into green products. However, there was scope for improvement in terms of exporting green products and an increased focus on localization. Hattingh noted that the Tracker's ranking of South Africa in terms of green recovery was relatively low partly as a result of the fact that whilst ambitious commitments have been made to address inclusive green recovery, not all these commitments have been implemented as yet.

During a panel discussion on whether South Africa is on the right track when it comes to COVID recovery, National Treasury director for Environmental Economics Georgina Ryan pointed out that "the structural reform agenda at its heart is close to the green economy recovery." The ERRP, she explains, prioritizes infrastructure, energy, employment and industrial growth whilst the green interventions centered on green industrialization opportunities across sectors (in the biodiversity economy, SMMEs, waste, agriculture etc.)

Basani Baloyi, from the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) argued however, that while the ERRP emphasizes job creation, it does not commit to broader structural transformation of the economy. She pointed to a disconnect between industrial policy instruments and green economy, with the ERRP reinforcing a fossil-fuel-based economy.

Mbali Hadebe-Moroe from the National Cleaner Production Center (NCPC) and representative of the I-Go Initiative for South Africa explained how the I-Go Initiative was being rolled out to support Local Green Entrepreneurs (LGEs) with access to market, access to finance and capacity building.

As a final issue to emerge during the webinar was the question of data collection in relation to tracking green economy progress. This emerged as a key challenge in the work being done by TIPS in putting together a Green Economy Barometer. Hattingh highlighted the need for a central green economy data house where researchers can share and collaborate on data to track Green Economy progress. TIPS will release the Green Economy Barometer in February 2022.

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TIPS has set up a Just Transition Knowledge Portal to assist in building a body of work around the just transition: <https://www.tips.org.za/just-transition>