

## Leeds University Business School – Research and Innovation Podcast

**Episode:** Just Transitions – a global exploration: Nigeria

**Speakers:** Dr Alexander Beresford and Dr Temitayo Odeyemi

[00:00:05] **Alex:** Hello and welcome everyone to the Research and Innovation Podcast. I'm Alex Beresford, Associate Professor in African politics at the University of Leeds.

[00:00:15] **Temitayo:** Hi, my name is Temitayo Odeyemi. I'm also with the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds.

[00:00:24] **Alex:** Thank you Temitayo. And in today's episode of the "Just Transition – A Global Exploration series", I'm going to be speaking to Temitayo about the just transition in Nigeria. So welcome Temitayo. It's a pleasure to have you here.

I think the first question I'd like to ask you is, who do you think are the key drivers of the just transition agenda in Nigeria?

[00:00:47] **Temitayo:** Thank you. An understanding of the key drivers will require some familiarity with the local dynamics that play out within the labour unions in Nigeria, and of course in the wider relationship between the unions and the government.

In Nigeria, there are two umbrella unions for labour organisations. You have the Nigeria Labour Congress, which is actually the older union and then the Trade Union Congress, which came much later, around 2005. And these two unions then have many other affiliate unions that are associated with them. For instance, 59 of such unions are affiliated with the Nigeria Congress, whereas just under 30 in the Trade Union Congress. And broadly these two unions have been very influential in any conversations at all about climate change. And more specifically about just transition and the sort of then drive any engagement that happens with government.

And on the government side, we also have, the Nigeria's Climate Change Law, which was passed in 2021, established in National Council on Climate Change (NCCC), which is then the key driver, the key national authority, that sort of conversation between government and unions.

So in that voice, we're talking about the two umbrella unions and this different sector-specific unions that are affiliated to them, as well as on the government side, the NCCC, leading a coalition of several other government department agencies and ministries that are working in that area.

[00:02:29] **Alex:** Thanks Temitayo for giving us that sense of the wider kind of landscape within which unions are operating. From your research, would you say that the unions at a national level tend to play a stronger role in these just transition initiatives? Or do you think that the agenda is being driven by unions at the kind of local sectoral level?

[00:02:50] **Temitayo:** The National Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress, more or less, they coordinate centrally at the national level, but they then also have all the call state councils across all the 36 of the Nigerian Federation. But then findings from my research have shown very clearly that most of the activities and conversations that take place around issues of just transition actually happen at a national level.

The reason is not farfetched. Some of the conversations around just transition are actually led or facilitated by organisations that are a bit external to Nigeria, the ILO, sort of organisations that then come in to partner with labour. And because these organisations tend to work more at the national government level, then they tend to focus on unions at that level. That sort of limits what happens at the subnational levels.

And also, there is also that tendency for unions at the subnational level to focus more on conventional labour matters - issues of wages, of pensions and things like that, working conditions. So whatever it is that climate change and just transition would represent, cross-cutting issues does not necessarily feature in their own conversation.

That sort of limits the the level of involvement that they have with this wider just transition debate and sort of in lot of ways means that the attention has been, at a national government level more often. Yes.

[00:04:26] **Alex:** Great. Thanks for that. So it's interesting, that focus at the national government level, but I wondered if you could tell us a little bit more about the work that you've done on the project in terms of the particular case study evidence that you've gathered and how the transition plays out at a local level.

[00:04:45] **Temitayo:** Yes, our research is actually at two levels. We did at a national level to sort of try to get a broad understanding of how the conversation is going there. At that level, who are the major participants and what sort of impressions that they have about climate change?

And part of the things that we have come to realize is that in a lot of ways there is still this, even though the understanding of just transition is developing, I'm talking about the national level now, you still have a situation where is still apart from the umbrella unions, the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress, is still much more dominant among unions in the energy sector.

We have two main unions in that sector that have been driving that conversation and some sort of other unions are playing catch up, to put it that way. So it's more dominant in the energy sector led by the national umbrella unions of the labour movement - the NLC and the TUC.

And at the subnational level, we have the conversation also sort of developing, and what we have done in our research there is to use the case study of the recent government removal of fossil subsidies in 2023, to sort of check how that has impacted the old discussion about fossil fuel and just transition.

So we focused on a state in northeast Nigeria called Borno State, to sort of try and see how the conversation has proceeded at that level. Because part of the ways that the Borno State government reacted or responded to the national government policy was to move almost very briefly into the deployment of electric vehicles and also the use of compressed natural gas driven vehicles.

So, unlike a situation where the transport sector will be privately driven, the government came in actively to promote the use of CNG driven vehicles and electric vehicles in the public transport system.

So that sort of led to conversations around the issue of transition that then shapes policy around wanting to drive greener energy and all of that. So we sort of tried to check how involved were labour unions in all of these conversations.

And part of the things that we found out, specifically, for instance, was the fact that labour actually played a very marginal role in the old conversation. The idea of moving towards electric vehicles and CNG driven vehicles - they were very active in making demands on government that as a result of the increase in cost of living from the fuel subsidy removal, that government should support them with some measures and all of that. And that gave rise to the idea of deploying CNG part vehicles and more of electric vehicles.

But in terms of the implementation, stage by stage or face by face implementation, the labour unions were not very, very involved. It was more of government agencies driving the sort of decisions that took place along the various stages. And in places or situations where labour unions were involved, it was more of the umbrella unions - the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress - who had some evidence, who confirmed that they actually featured, in one way or the other. Whereas the unions in public transport sector whose livelihoods, whose living standards and things like that, or income, would be affected by this policy, were not exactly consulted.

So it was a case of Government taking the voice of the umbrella unions as a voice of labour. Whereas the umbrella unions also think that they already have the mandate to speak on behalf of every of their affiliate unions. (59 for the NLC and nearly 30 for the TUC.)

That sort of created some obstacles and at the end of the day, they have a situation where the transport sector unions then complained, over and over, about the exclusion from the process and the impact that that has had - the government policy, the transition policy - has had on their own incomes, of course that then links to wider discussion about just transition.

So we have looked, our research has looked at this, at these two broad aspects. At the national level, what is happening - the energy sector, much more dominant. Slow progress on the other sectors that are much more at the risk of climate change. And at a subnational level, limited conversation going on and where conversation is going on at all, it's also more about the national government levels at the state level, whereas the specific sector-focused unions or sector-specific unions have a very little role to play in the entire process.

[00:09:48] **Alex:** Thanks Temitayo. It's really, really interesting. So I've just got one kind of final question I wanted to ask you about this, and it relates to what you've said about the unions only playing what you said was a marginal role in this, particularly at the kind of local levels where the national unions were having more of a say, what are the debates in Nigeria, if any, about justice in the transition?

I mean, are those unions, for example, in the transport sector, able to put forward positions about what justice is and how justice can be pursued for workers?

[00:10:27] **Temitayo:** Yes. Limited conversation going at least, explicitly to put, if we were to look at it from the explicit dimension, as limited conversation, because the platforms are not really there. They're not very evident in terms of how they can put forward their ideas and preferences. But then implicitly it's possible to then assume that their position is how their jobs can be protected going forward.

It is not that they are against any policy. They recognise the fact that government takes the lead in policies and can choose to move slower or faster in the direction of transition, but they are very keen that the process protects their job and their livelihoods going forward. So that's what justice would mean to them. That whatever it is that government is doing is done in a way that protects their own interest going forward. That's a summary exactly what they think, should be happening at the subnational level.

And at the national level there is this tendency to emphasize the aspect of what they call “decent work”. We sort of also identified a disparity, so to speak, between the position of labour unions and state actors, whereas labour unions see the whole idea of just transition as relating to workers, decent work, decent living, in some instances workers and the community, because they see workers as also part of the communities. In the interpretation of state actors, they tend to interpret just transition more broadly, looking at diverse groups that make up the society.

And that's why most of Nigeria's published documents and frameworks on climate change referred to, when it comes to just transition, they're mentioning women, young people, different sections, strands of the society, to put it that way. So there is this, very little ways that they diverse.

So at that level, unions will pick justice to mean what safeguards their interest, their rights to decent work environment, their rights to live in, and all the work-related rights, around how the transition takes space.

[00:12:47] **Alex:** Great. Thank you Temitayo for that really, really engaging overview of some of the key complexities and challenges of Nigeria's just transition.

And for our listeners, if you'd like to find out more, from some of the other case studies, for example, the details of how to find the other podcasts in this series are in the show notes.

So finally, thank you once again Temitayo.

[00:13:11] **Temitayo:** Thank you for the opportunity for speaking with you. Thank you.

**Ends**