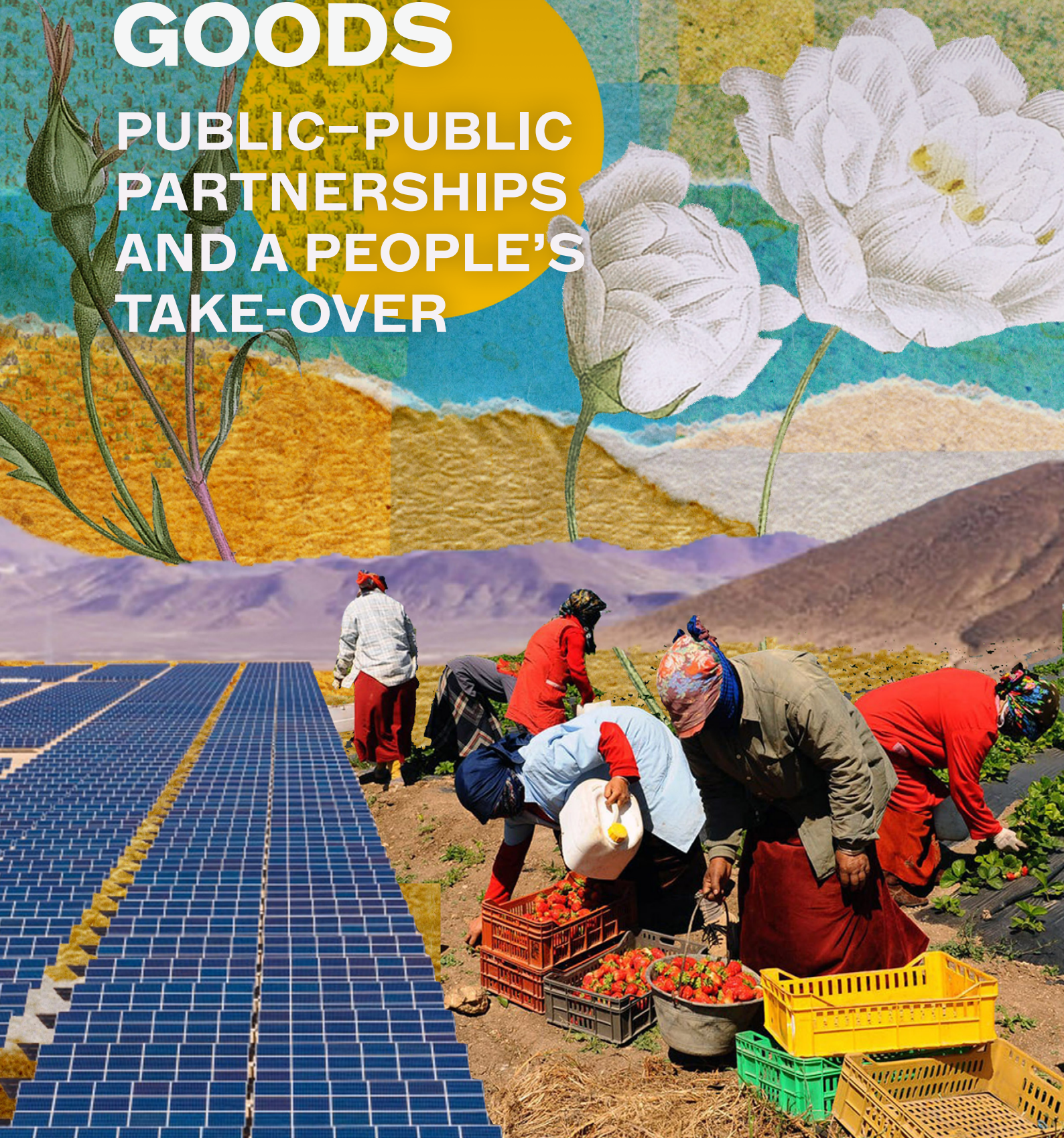


RECLAIMING ENERGY REPORT



PART 4 — GLOBAL PUBLIC GOODS

PUBLIC-PUBLIC
PARTNERSHIPS
AND A PEOPLE'S
TAKE-OVER



This is Part 4 of the Reclaiming Energy publication. Read the full report and find out about the other public pathways to break the fossil fuel cycle: tni.org/reclaimingenergy

The Reclaiming Energy report, the third in TNI's Public Power trilogy, aims to unpack key strategies to strengthen energy democracy struggles the world over.

With the climate crisis escalating, labour and environmental justice groups are searching for systemic solutions. These solutions must uproot the logic of private profit, which is keeping energy systems from phasing out fossil fuels and ramping up renewables. Public ownership of energy can be exactly this: an urgent, viable and bold alternative to the failures of profit-driven markets and multinationals.

By employing a decolonial lens, we call for deprivatising and decommodifying public power systems as a condition for shaping pathways towards democratic governance and public-community partnerships across scale and territories. This means approaching the right to clean energy as inseparable from the right to land and resource justice.

Far from a silver bullet, defending and expanding energy as a global public good requires ongoing social struggles towards a sustainable energy sector that is deeply democratic and decolonial by design.

DATE December 2024

AUTHORS Lavinia Steinfort, Rowan Mataram and James Angel

EDITOR AND PROOFREADER Sarah Finch

REVIEWERS Katie Sandwell, Sylvia Kay, Eleanor Radcliffe and Vera Weghmann

CONTRIBUTORS Louisa Valentin, Pablo Messina and Martín Sanguinetti

PUBLISHER Transnational Institute

DESIGNER Ivan Klisurić / ivanklis.studio

ILLUSTRATOR FACTSHEETS Fourate Chahal El Rekaby

Download full report on <https://www.tni.org/reclaimingenergy>

For more information, contact: l.steinfort@tni.org or r.mataram@tni.org

The Transnational Institute (TNI) is an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet. For 50 years, TNI has served as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy-makers. And for two decades, TNI has been working on public alternatives with a focus on public ownership of energy. The project towards establishing an international Public Power Observatory is embedded in this accumulated knowledge and expertise. <https://www.tni.org/en>

4.0 SUMMARY

Part 4 of the report illustrates the cause for optimism around possibilities for systemically reclaiming energy.

We begin by discussing the importance of public–public partnerships (PuPs), which see public institutions collaborating with each other to build skills, expertise and capacity for energy transition leadership. **PuPs are emerging as a popular solidarity-based alternative to profit-driven public–private partnerships. They can take many forms, from public banks that finance public renewables through to associations of public bodies that collaborate to own and operate electricity utilities or to engage in peer-learning schemes to share transition skills.** Instead of using public funds for private gain, PuPs create opportunities to treat energy as a global public good: a common good available to all, for everyone’s benefit. **Cementing this understanding of energy across the world could ensure all aspects of the energy system centre justice.**

PuPs can be combined with direct public procurement. This entails contracting a private company with the explicit purpose of building up public energy skills, assets, and technologies — for example, by transferring ownership and management of an energy asset to public hands upon completion of the contract. The hopeful expansion of pro-public energy struggles across the world demonstrates that there is ample potential for PuPs to take off and multiply. This final part of the report ends by documenting a number of these struggles, showing that another energy system — led by and for ‘the public’ — really is possible.

4.1 INTERNATIONAL & COUNTRY-WIDE COOPERATION: THE PUBLIC–PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

Social movements correctly demand more ambitious climate targets. At the same time, liberalisation and privatisation of the energy sector have eroded government capacity to steer and implement the transition in line with these targets. Public authorities have been unbundling and divesting from their state-owned utilities and outsourcing renewable energy production to big business in the name of public–private partnerships.

Many governments have come to see their role as a financier of the transition instead of as the central authority responsible for planning, managing and executing it. Take, for instance, the hope that public climate finance would turn billions into trillions: a UN-commissioned report submitted to the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference, more commonly referred to as COP26, showed that, in fact, public money is footing the bill, with four dollars of public finance invested for every additional private sector dollar.¹

¹ Sweeney, S. (2024) ‘The fad is dead: why “Just Energy Transition Partnerships” are failing’, *New Labor Forum*, 33(2), 95–102. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10957960241241815>; & UK Government (n.d.) Climate Finance Delivery Plan: Meeting the US\$100 billion goal (no date), p. 6. Available at: <https://ukcop26.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Climate-Finance-Delivery-Plan-1.pdf> (Accessed: 13 August 2024).

The funding model of Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), which emerged from COP26, is the latest international mechanism intended to finance decarbonisation in the global South. JETPs were intended to help countries such as South Africa, Indonesia and Vietnam to phase out their coal reliance. Although JETPs are hailed as a game changer, they actually risk creating more problems.²

Firstly, **JETPs shift the focus away from the coal-dependent economies of Germany and the United States — who are together responsible for 11.5 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.**³ Secondly, they are based on a loan model, even though the targeted countries already spend a large proportion of their public budget on debt servicing. While much of that earlier debt has been classified as illegitimate, JETPs will result in even higher levels of indebtedness.⁴ At the same time, the billion dollar loans that countries can attain through **JETPs represent just a fraction of the \$1 trillion per year that ‘developing’ countries would need to spend by 2025 to reach energy transition targets.**⁵ Finally, as demonstrated in the South Africa case study in Part 1, JETPs can be tied to liberalisation measures, such as unbundling a country’s state-owned utility, which tend to increase public costs to enable private sector returns.⁶

This approach of using public finance for private profit is increasing the inequalities outlined in this report — and hollows out governments’ capacities to coordinate decarbonisation for the benefit of the whole population. Things do not have to be this way, especially once we realise that the energy transition has not been happening because of liberalisation, but despite it.⁷

Public–public partnerships (PuPs) are a key mechanism that governments and utilities can use as an alternative to public–private partnerships. PuPs can help coordinate a joint phase-out of fossil fuels and

-
- 2 Global Energy Justice Working Group (2023) *Change the System, Not the Climate: What is wrong with the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP)?* Available at: https://www.uni-kassel.de/forschung/files/Global_Partnership_Network/Downloads/JETP_Pamphlet.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2024).
 - 3 Sweeney, S. (2024) ‘Just Energy Partnerships’ Are Failing’, *Jacobin*, 5 May. Available at: <https://jacobin.com/2024/05/just-energy-partnerships-climate-finance> [Accessed: 27 November 2024].
 - 4 Youmans Hernandez, P.M. (2005) ‘The doctrine of odious debt : a solution for post apartheid South Africa’, *HIM 1990–2015*. Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses1990-2015/520> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).; Pettifor, A. (2007) ‘Dirty debt’, *Inside Indonesia*, 30 July. Available at: <https://www.insideindonesia.org/editions/edition-6938/dirty-debt> (Accessed: 13 August 2024); Gelpert, A. (2007) ‘Odious, Not Debt’, *Law & Contemporary Problems* 70:81, 81–114. Available at: <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1434&context=lcp> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).
 - 5 Songwe V, Stern N, and Bhattacharya, A (2022) *Finance for Climate Action: Scaling Up Investment for Climate and Development*. London: Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/IHLEG-Finance-for-Climate-Action-1.pdf> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).
 - 6 Sweeney, S. (2024) ‘“Just energy partnerships” are failing’, *Jacobin*, 5 May. Available at: <https://jacobin.com/2024/05/just-energy-partnerships-climate-finance> (Accessed: 13 August 2024).
 - 7 TNI (2023) *MYTH #2 — Free Markets are the Best Route towards a Low-Carbon Energy System*. TNI. Available at: https://www.tni.org/files/2023-09/Factsheet%20No.2%20_%20TNI%20_%20Energy%20Transition%20Mythbusters%202023%20_%20300823.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

private capital's hold over the energy sector, while supporting public actors to learn from each other towards increasing their transition capacities. This is vital in order to start treating and popularising clean energy as the global public good that it is, a fundamental part of delivering climate justice.

BOX 4.1

GLOBAL PUBLIC GOODS, A DEFINITION

A public good is a term from economics that identifies that the use of a good is both 'non-excludable' and 'non-rivalrous'. This means that the good is available to all, and that one person's use of the good does not deny anyone else access to it. Air and the environment are often cited as examples of public goods.

TUED provides a useful summary of how the concept applies to climate change: increasing emissions anywhere endangers people everywhere; while a globally just energy transition reduces emissions anywhere, and benefits people everywhere.⁸ Therefore, climate change mitigation through publicly owned energy systems, as outlined in this report, qualifies as a public good.

The privatisation of the energy system has created winners and losers from the energy transition, in what should actually be a win-win for the world and its future. Actors in the energy sector and energy transition-related value chains act as competitors by design, excluding others from participating in and benefiting from a decarbonisation trajectory.

While this is perhaps one of the most difficult tasks that every government is charged with — **we can instead design energy systems to ensure universal access and benefit.** Public-public partnerships are a concrete tool with which public bodies can collaborate, rather than compete — working together towards delivering a non-excludable and non-rivalrous energy transition as a global public good.

PuPs are a solidarity-based collaboration between public institutions with the aim of improving the capacity and effectiveness of one, or both, of the partners involved. PuPs can also take the form of collaboration to finance a public service, or to deliver it jointly. The former tends to be done by a public bank, which is able to provide long-term loans at lower interest rates than the private sector (see the box below). PuPs can also include peer learning around shared values and objectives that exclude profit-seeking, whether directly or indirectly. Peer partnerships like this have a solid track record among water utilities. In 2009, Transnational Institute, Public Services International (PSI) and PSIRU (PSI's research

8 Sweeney, *Towards a Public Pathway Approach to a Just Energy Transition for the Global South*.

unit), identified over 130 PuPs in the water sector. These initiatives were spread across 70 countries, with each sharing the aim of contributing to technical expertise, human resources, institutional capacity, financing and participation.⁹

Take, for example, the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority (PPWSA) that supplies water across the Cambodian capital. PPWSA has been providing free advice, training and on-site assistance to other utilities. In 2007, it entered into a water-operator partnership with Binh Duong Water Supply Sewerage Environment Company, a Vietnamese public water company. This peer-learning relationship enabled the latter to acquire better operating procedures, fully-trained personnel, a 24-hour customer hotline, fewer user complaints and higher revenues.¹⁰ Then, between 2016 and 2021, under a new PuP, the French Development Agency supported PPWSA technically and financially to increase drinking water production in order to respond to growing demand among the population, in particular extending access to marginalised communities in the outskirts of Phnom Penh. This has reduced the water bills of 300,000 people who would otherwise have continued to buy water from private firms at rates three times higher than the average PPWSA price.¹¹

Brazil and Uruguay also engaged in a water PuP. In 2012, the Uruguayan State Water Department (OSE), Uruguay's sole provider of water and sanitation services, and the Municipal Department of Water and Sewerage of Porto Alegre, Brazil, started working together. The goal was to improve operational efficiency and technical systems and to guarantee water as a fundamental human right. As the researcher Javier Marquez puts it: **‘Through this partnership both parties found ways to improve and strengthen their practices as providers of a vital public service. These improvements were not only technical and administrative in nature but also social. As part of the agreement, both service providers committed to better incorporating human rights principles into their operations and supporting each other to find solutions to the challenges in realising the human rights to water and sanitation in their respective regions.’**¹²

These examples show how **PuPs can go both ways. A public institution can at the same time support others and also benefit from the support of**

9 Hall, D. et al. (2009) *Public–Public Partnerships (PUPs) in Water*. TNI. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/public-public-partnerships-pups-in-water> (Accessed: 13 August 2024).

10 Hall et al., *Public–Public Partnerships (PUPs) in Water*.

11 Agence Française de Développement (n.d.) *Supporting the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority in the Context of the Challenge of Urban Growth*. Available at: <https://www.afd.fr/en/carte-des-projets/supporting-phnom-penh-water-supply-authority-context-challenge-urban-growth> (Accessed: 13 August 2024).

12 Valderrama, J., Pérez, L. and Restrepo, B. (2023) *Public–Community Partnerships in Latin America: An alternative vision for improving the water sector*. Available at: <https://blueplanetproject.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/1ec15-publicwaterforall-mar14-pup.pdf> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

another public institution. This mutuality is what can happen when solidarity towards quality public services is the goal of a partnership, rather than profit.

Another kind of PuP is associations for the public ownership, management and delivery of public goods and services. In 2009, these kinds of partnerships were established within the water sector, with the Platform for Public and Community Partnerships of the Americas and the European Association of Public Water Operators, Aqua Publica Europea. In 2018, a Catalan counterpart, the Association of Municipalities for Public Water Management, was created. The latter supports local authorities to shift to and improve public water management models, in order to ensure water supply and sanitation are guaranteed equally to all citizens, serving public interests instead of corporate ones.¹³ In 2019, also in Catalonia, 400 municipalities formed the Association of Municipalities and Entities for Public Energy. The aim: to work together towards renewable public power production and retail, all the while developing forms of citizen participation.¹⁴

In the energy sector, both utilities and civil society have much to benefit from public–public partnerships. For utilities, it is simply more cost-effective to turn to other public institutions to increase their energy transition capacity than to enter into a public–private partnership, because in the case of a PuP, they will not have to pay profit margins. Moreover, when initiated and co-developed by civil society, PuPs can be a powerful policy instrument to build public ethos and democratic control into cross-country capacity building on the energy transition. Indeed, PuPs tend to be open to civil society involvement, including trade unions, community groups and citizens' groups, and can even be initiated by such actors.¹⁵

In the energy sector, public collaborations are particularly popular on the municipal level. One example is the mPower project, funded by the Horizon2020 programme of the European Commission. This was a consortium of two public institutions and five civil society organisations, including TNI, who together developed a peer learning programme for European local authorities in support of fair, clean and democratic energy transitions. mPower supported 104 municipalities to reach their sustainable energy targets, resulting in four new energy projects, 17 institutionalised energy policies and 31 improved energy plans. Peer learning and project support from civil society organisations Carbon Co-op and Energy Cities assisted the Energaia Energy Agency of Porto, Portugal to develop an interregional Renewable Energy Community, securing €60,000 funding for

13 Aqua Publica Europa (2020) 'Aqua Publica welcomes the Catalan Association of Municipalities for Public Water Management (AMAP) as a new associate member', 15 June. Available at: <https://www.aquapublica.eu/article/news/aqua-publica-welcomes-catalan-association-municipalities-public-water-management-amap> (Accessed: 13 August 2024).

& AMAP (2024) Home page. Available at: <https://amap.cat/es/> (Accessed: 13 September 2024).

14 Interview with Irene Gonzalez of Engineers Without Borders (ISF Cataluña) on 9 May 2024. For more information about the Association of Municipalities and Entities for Public Energy: AMEP (2024) Home page. Available at: <https://amep.cat/> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).

15 Hall et al., *Public–Public Partnerships (PUPs) in Water*.

the project from the European City Facility and obtaining political commitments from six neighbouring municipalities.¹⁶

It is difficult to know how many PuPs have been happening below the radar in the energy sector. This is not only because these partnerships come in many forms, but also because most energy policy attention has been diverted to public-private partnerships. However, in light of the many drawbacks of for-profit involvement, the success of PuPs in the water sector and a growing appetite among local authorities to learn from others, energy PuPs could be a very useful instrument to increase much-needed public capacities. **Whether the focus is technical training for public transition workers, upgrading utility grids to accommodate variable and decentralised renewable electricity production, or planning and executing the energy transition across levels of government — the pooling, sharing and enhancement of expertise under PuPs are key to delivering an energy transition with the speed and scale required.**

TUED South argues that ‘PUPs could provide some of the institutional superstructure of a new public energy system. PUPs can also facilitate full cooperation around R&D functions, the development of new technologies and the improvement of existing ones, all within a public goods framework.’¹⁷ This aligns with the estimate by the European Commission that almost half of R&D funds for solar energy originated from public sources, a proportion that is expected to increase over time. PuPs, in combination with a public mandate, could support governments and public utilities to assess which energy transition technologies are viable, least harmful to the environment and most deserving of public funds. This could help boost investment in R&D and scale up demand-reduction, renewable energy and energy storage solutions accordingly.

BOX 4.2

A GLOBAL PUBLIC BANKING ECOSYSTEM TO FUND THE ENERGY TRANSITION

PuPs are taking off in the realm of banking — creating funding avenues outside private finance to mitigate and adapt to climate change. **The Finance in Common Summit** was inaugurated in 2020 as a global forum for the world’s public development banks — there are an estimated 530 public development banks globally, holding more than a combined \$23 trillion in assets.¹⁸

¹⁶ Steinfert, L. and Angel, J. (2022) *Making Municipal Power Work: mPower Project: Results And Impacts*. TNI. Available at: <https://municipalpower.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Making-municipal-power-work-TNI-mpower-2022-261022-F.pdf> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

¹⁷ Sweeney, *Towards a Public Pathway Approach to a Just Energy Transition for the Global South*.

¹⁸ Finance in Common (2023) *Finance in Common: The Global Summit of Public Development Banks*. Available at: https://financeincommon.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Booklet-VA-2023_REFRESH_PLANCHE.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

Despite the dominant role that private finance has in energy policy, regional development banks are already channelling finance to their national counterparts in support of energy and other public goods in-frastructure that must become climate resilient.¹⁹

Much of this research and advocacy work is led by Thomas Marois, Director of the Public Banking Project at McMaster University. Professor Marois is calling on governments to mandate national and multilateral development banks to form a global ecosystem of public banking collaborations that improve the quantity and quality of financing global public goods — such as clean electricity, energy efficiency and long-term storage measures.²⁰

This radical policy proposal is now being picked up by the T20, a G20 engagement group of think tanks aiming to influence G20 Finance processes, and serves as evidence input towards the United Nations' 2025 International Financing for Development Conference in Spain.²¹

Because many governments have long prioritised the wishes of big business at the expense of citizens — whether their own or those overseas — people are rightly sceptical of whether the state has their interest at heart. PuPs, alongside public-community collaborations,²² are key tools for public bodies to gain the public support needed to execute a just transition. **Moreover, a combination of public and community actors can protect public infrastructure from privatisation pressures or political change.**

The current energy model may seem far removed from PuPs that are based on solidarity. Yet once governments and state-owned electricity utilities realise that they have much to gain from partnering with other public energy bodies, the turnaround can be quick. As we continue to miss climate targets, it is increasingly difficult to imagine worldwide decarbonisation without this kind of equitable international cooperation.

DIRECT PUBLIC PROCUREMENT TO TRANSFER SKILLS, ASSETS & TECHNOLOGIES

Establishing PuPs does not imply that one should simply ignore the private sector. Following years of liberalisation and privatisation, governments and public

19 Marois, T. *et al.* (2023) *Fostering a Global Public Financial Ecosystem for Development and Climate Action*. G20 Brasil 2024. Available at: https://www.t20brasil.org/media/documentos/arquivos/TF03_ST_02_Fostering_a_Global166e198a8dae39.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

20 Marois, *Fostering a Global Public Financial Ecosystem for Development and Climate Action*.

21 Güngen A.R. *et al.* (2024) 'A global public banking ecosystem breakthrough', TNI, 25 October. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/a-global-public-banking-ecosystem-breakthrough> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

22 See TNI's *Progressive Public Procurement Toolkit* for more information about public-community collaborations. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/progressive-public-procurement-toolkit> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

energy companies have much to gain from private enterprises with energy transition expertise. **However, instead of just stepping up as a financier, public authorities could employ direct public procurement to contract private companies with the purpose of building up energy skills, assets and technologies in-house.**²³ For example, procurement contracts could stipulate that upon completion of the contract, the ownership of a wind farm or even of a wind turbine factory would be transferred to the public.

Although direct public procurement still means that governments would pay for an initial profit margin, this can be a key intermediate policy tool towards taking the energy transition in-house. This can contribute to moving away from the approach of partnering with the private sector with the unrealistic expectation that this will trickle down into a full-fledged transition. Instead, **governments can contract corporations in ways that go beyond tying them to social and environmental conditions by also including the more far-reaching condition of conceding ownership.** Moreover, direct procurement can be used for training a public workforce to acquire any technical skills that are key for a publicly-owned transition and which can then be passed on through a public training programme.

This way, the public energy sector can become equipped not only to deliver an energy transition in their own jurisdiction, but also to partner with other public authorities to coordinate the take-off of an energy transition as a global public good.

4.2 A GROWING GLOBAL MOVEMENT

The potential for PuPs is vast and ever-growing, given the rise of a burgeoning global movement for public power and energy democracy. **Around the world, people are organising to reverse electricity privatisation, with the aim of building a better, more affordable and decarbonised public energy system.** This is happening in a variety of countries and across scales.

Trade unions have, for decades, been at the forefront of this massive public power struggle, with Public Services International and, more recently, multi-sector initiative Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, strengthening trade union efforts virtually everywhere. These convergences also consist of many other key social and environmental justice groups, including countless human rights defenders. **With struggles already galvanising movements on all continents, this is nothing less than a global movement.** While it is beyond the scope of this report to give a comprehensive account of these energy struggles, we can briefly explore a few prominent cases.



NORTH TO SOUTH AFRICA

On the African continent, the resistance against privatisation is growing. This is no surprise, given that private sector involvement has long been a mechanism to ruthlessly subject populations and ecosystems to exploitation. As outlined

23 Sweeney, *Towards a Public Pathway Approach to a Just Energy Transition for the Global South*, p. 27.

in our case studies about Tunisia and South Africa, trade unions and social movements have been collaborating to fight against privatisation, liberalisation and attacks on state-owned utilities.

In early 2023, the Ugandan government decided to deprivatise part of its electricity system as contracts with private and multinational companies were coming to a close. **The government will set up the state-owned Uganda National Electricity Company, reversing decades of unbundling, which happened in response to pressures from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.** For about 20 years, Uganda's electricity system has been in the hands of Eskom, South Africa's state-owned multinational, and the international private consortium Umeme. During this period, grid electrification increased from 5 to 16 per cent, but tariffs also shot up. According to Public Services International, within two years following privatisation, tariffs rose by close to 60 per cent. The overwhelming majority of the Ugandan population still does not have access to power, let alone an affordable service. At the same time, the private sector has extracted massive profits. Actis, a private UK aid fund that owned and then sold Umeme, profited and shipped off \$129 million to tax haven Mauritius.²⁴

Social struggle will determine what the benefits of state-owned energy will turn out to be in Uganda. On the one hand, this will depend on Uganda's access to international finance, which will be required to build a capable and well-resourced public power sector. On the other hand, it will depend on civil society's ability to hold its government to account and increase democratic control. **Nevertheless, the objectives of nationalisation are clear: to minimise expensive private capital for investments in transmission, generation and distribution, and to increase service performance and affordability for the Ugandan population.**²⁵

BOX 4.3

NEW TRADE UNIONS' PLATFORM FOR A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) is a multi-sector initiative that has a membership of 100 trade union bodies and counting, spanning 37 countries and regions. TUED aims to advance public ownership and democratic control within the energy sector in a way that promotes solutions to the climate crisis,

24 Finance: Uncovered (2018) *Private Profits and the Public Purse*. PSI. Available at: https://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/attachment/news/private_profits_and_the_public_purse33.pdf (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

25 Tena, N. (2022) 'Uganda to form electricity company to take over from Eskom', *ESI-Africa.com*, 13 December. Available at: <https://www.esi-africa.com/east-africa/uganda-to-nationalise-electricity-utility-as-private-contracts-conclude> (Accessed: 15 August 2024).

energy poverty, the degradation of land and people, and attacks on workers' rights and protections. to it. Air and the environment are often cited as examples of public goods.²⁶

TUED's research papers unpack multiple themes, including: how policies focused on the market and the private sector have prevented the energy transition from taking off;²⁷ the need to invest public funds directly in a pro-public and system-wide energy transition;²⁸ how trade unions and civil society can reclaim the just transition discourse;²⁹ and how public planning and ownership are necessary for 'community energy' to contribute meaningfully to a just transition.³⁰

In October 2022, more than 70 trade union leaders gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, to launch TUED South. Ever since, the South-led platform has been holding (inter)regional conferences with the aim of developing a 'Public Pathway' approach to just energy transition, policies and forms of collective ownership across the vast and diverse global South.³¹

TUED South specifically focuses on strengthening trade unions to reclaim and restore state-owned electricity utilities in their respective countries.³² The goal is to counteract so-called 'green structural adjustment' efforts, through which powerful countries, alongside the IMF and the World Bank, keep resource-rich countries locked into ever more debt, while grabbing their land and critical metals and other minerals. **The focus on building better public utilities seeks to address increasing levels of energy poverty through building the capacity of publicly owned renewables to significantly reduce fossil fuel dependency across Southern countries.**

-
- 26 For more information: *Trade unions for energy democracy* (2022). Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org> (Accessed: 15 August 2024).
- 27 Sweeney, S. and Treat, J. (2017) *Energy Transition: Are We "Winning"?*. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/working-papers/energy-transition-are-we-winning> (Accessed: 15 August 2024).
- 28 Sweeney, S. and Treat, J. (2017) *Preparing a Public Pathway: Confronting the Investment Crisis in Renewable Energy*. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy. Available at: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/63276dc4e6b803208bf159df/63405e51a62fb823621d02b7_TUED-WP10-Preparing-a-Public-Pathway.pdf (Accessed: 15 August 2024).
- 29 Sweeney and Treat, *Trade Unions and Just Transition*.
- 30 Sweeney, S., Treat, J. and Shen, I.H. (2020) *Working Paper No. 13 Transition in Trouble? The Rise and Fall of "Community Energy" in Europe*. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy. Available at: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/63276dc4e6b803208bf159df/63405db1bf6fabffca0a1b83_TUED-WP13-Transition-in-Trouble.pdf (Accessed: 15 July 2024).
- 31 PSI (2022) 'Union leaders meet for launch of TUED South', PSI, 13 October. Available at: <https://publicservices.international/resources/news/union-leaders-meet-for-br-launch-of-tued-south?id=13410&lang=en> (Accessed: 15 July 2024).
- 32 Sweeney, S. (2023) *Reclaim and Restore: Preparing a Public Pathway to Address Energy Poverty and Energy Transition in sub-Saharan Africa*. TUED. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/working-papers/reclaim-and-restore-preparing-a-public-pathway-ssa> (Accessed: 15 August 2024).



WESTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE

With Russia's war in Ukraine ongoing, the energy crisis is illustrating the ills of privatisation ever more sharply across Europe. Although the situation is much more severe in Eastern Europe, building on the United Kingdom case study, this section will be limited to those countries where public energy struggles have been gaining traction so far, namely Western, Central and Southern Europe.

In the Netherlands, thanks to coalition building between labour and climate groups, inroads have been made to putting energy democracy together with public ownership of both fossil fuels and renewables on the agenda.³³ The government has liberalised the gas sector much more extensively than many other European countries, and Dutch users pay twice as much as the average European household.³⁴ In response, the Dutch government decided in 2022 that in coming years it would bring the majority of the heating networks back into public hands. However, it will require ongoing social struggle to keep the pressure on public authorities to actually hold the government to their word. Meanwhile, Dutch energy analysts are making the case for public-private partnerships.³⁵

In neighbouring Germany, the anti-nuclear movement of the seventies evolved into decades-long efforts by communities to build democratic municipal energy models resulting in 305 reclaimed and newly built municipal energy systems.³⁶ Then, in late 2022, the federal government nationalised a former Gazprom subsidiary to secure its energy needs.³⁷ But public ownership should go much further. **Significantly, there is a campaign under way to expropriate and socialise Germany's biggest CO₂ polluter, RWE, alongside other large energy companies. The goal is to democratise the whole energy sector and turn it into a socially and environmentally just operation.**³⁸

In Austria, the majority of the energy system is fully or partially state owned. However, following the European Union's push towards liberalisation and

33 Steinfort, L. (2023) 'Subsidising corporate profits derails decarbonisation in the Netherlands', TNI, 12 October. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/subsidising-corporate-profits-derails-decarbonisation-in-the-netherlands> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

34 NOS (2022) 'Nederland heeft hoogste gasprijs van EU, FNV wil prijsplafond en hogere lonen' 9 August. Available at: <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2439953-nederland-heeft-hoogste-gasprijs-van-eu-fnv-wil-prijsplafond-en-hogere-lonen> (Accessed: 30 July 2024).

35 Herreras Martinez, S. *et al.* (2023) 'Why go public? Public configurations and the supportive and divergent views towards public district heating in the Netherlands', *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2023.1220884> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).

36 Kishimoto, S., Steinfort, L. and Petitjean, O. (2020) *The Future Is Public: Towards Democratic Ownership Of Services* (2020). TNI. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-future-is-public-democratic-ownership-of-public-services> (Accessed: 1 November 2024).

37 Kyllmann, C. (2022) 'Germany nationalises former Gazprom subsidiary in bid to secure gas supply', *Clean Energy Wire*, 15 November. Available at: <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/news/germany-nationalises-former-gazprom-subsidiary-bid-secure-gas-supply> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

38 RWE & Co Enteignen, *Nehmen Was Uns Zusteht*.

privatisation, Austria was one of the first countries to corporatise two of their major energy suppliers, OMV and Verbund.³⁹ The remaining publicly-owned companies across the energy system are able to operate like private businesses, charging high tariffs to ensure returns for their shareholders.⁴⁰ This left Austria just as vulnerable to unaffordable tariffs as the rest of Europe, despite state ownership.⁴¹ In response, civil society campaign group ATTAC Austria has been leading a civil society campaign to socialise the country's energy system. Socialisation recognises that public ownership is not sufficient in itself and must go hand in hand with democratic decision-making. ATTAC demands lower tariffs, non-profit energy suppliers, and socially just and climate-friendly energy production.⁴²

In France, energy workers achieved an important success in 2022, when the government put its plan to privatise the state-owned energy company Électricité de France (EDF) on hold.⁴³ The government wanted to sell off the most profitable parts of the business (marketing and renewable energy generation), while maintenance, which requires major investment, would remain in government hands. The trade unions of the Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour, CGT) responded by developing an alternative public energy proposal centring democratic control that would involve users, workers and elected officials.⁴⁴ **That user and worker interests can align is powerfully expressed by the 2023 'Robin Hood' operations, in which energy workers reconnected low-income homes as well as schools and hospitals to the grid, providing them with free power and gas.**⁴⁵

In Catalonia, as mentioned above, hundreds of municipalities have organised themselves in an association to support its members to be active in the production and retail of renewable electricity, with some attention to popular participation.⁴⁶ Moreover, the Catalan government recently created the public energy company L'Energètica, which started to manage renewable assets with the goal

39 Attac (n.d.) 'Mythbuster & FAQ', Attac Österreich. Available at: <https://www.attac.at/kampagnen/energieversorgung-demokratisieren/fragen-und-antworten-zum-energiesystem> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

40 Attac, *Mythbuster & FAQ*.

41 Attac, *Mythbuster & FAQ*.

42 Attac (2024) *Energieversorgung demokratisieren!*, Attac Österreich. Available at: <https://www.attac.at/kampagnen/energieversorgung-demokratisieren> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

43 Hernandez, A. and Leali, G. (2021) 'France puts EDF reform on hold', *POLITICO*, 29 July. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-edf-reform-on-hold/> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

44 Fédération Nationale des Mines et de L'énergie CGT, *La nécessité d'une transition énergétique pour TOUS réduisant les inégalités*.

45 York, J. (2023) "'Robin Hood' energy strikers give free power to French schools, hospitals, low-income homes", *France 24*, 27 January. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20230127-robin-hood-energy-strikers-give-free-power-to-french-schools-hospitals-low-income-homes> (Accessed: 16 July 2024).

46 Interview with Irene Gonzalez of Engineers Without Borders (ISF Catalunya) on 9 May, 2024. For more information about the Association of Municipalities and Entities for Public Energy: AMEP (2024) Home page. Available at: <https://amep.cat/> (Accessed: 6 November 2024).

of achieving 1GW by 2040.⁴⁷ In July 2024, the company initiated its first public procurement process towards purchasing new renewable energy projects.⁴⁸

The Catalan Network for Energy Sovereignty, managed to force the multinational Endesa to write off 28 million Euros of users' energy debts.⁴⁹ This followed a 2015 bill that passed at the Catalan level, forbidding companies to cut off energy access to precarious households. This victory means that Endesa is forced to cancel over 70 per cent of people's energy debts accrued in the years 2015–2020.⁵⁰ Also, **a number of municipalities are suing the big energy companies, including Endesa, in order to return hydroelectric dams to local public ownership.**⁵¹ **However, since the grid in Catalonia is still in the hands of Endesa, electricity distribution remains the main issue with regard to planning the transition and lowering the bills of poor households.**



LATIN AMERICA

Latin America, like the rest of the world, has been plagued by pressures to privatise the energy sector since the 1990s. This has furthered injustices across every aspect of the energy supply chain. Yet across the region, popular resistance and public governance models have provided a beacon for many looking towards alternative energy systems. This is especially true in the case studies of Costa Rica and Mexico discussed previously.

Another Latin American country that excels in realising the potential of renewable energy production is Uruguay. As of 2023, Uruguay generates 95 per cent of its energy from renewable sources and the state-owned electricity grid supplies energy to the majority of its population.⁵² The country's journey was swift, with their energy transition achieved in under a decade. The transition was spearheaded by the national utility, the Administración Nacional de Usinas y Transmisiones Eléctricas (National Administration of Power Plants and Electrical Transmissions, UTE), which owns the transmission and distribution network and the majority of energy generation. **Alongside a blueprint for other countries for achieving such a transition, the Uruguayan story also contains a warning — the use of renewables to enable stealth privatisation of the**

47 L'energètica (n.d.) 'L'energia neta de Catalunya'. Available at: <https://lenergetica.cat/> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

48 Kavitha (2024) 'L'energètica launches public procurement for renewable energy projects in Catalonia', *SolarQuarter*, 2 July. Available at: <https://solarquarter.com/2024/07/02/lenergetica-launches-public-procurement-for-renewable-energy-projects-in-catalonia/> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

49 Right to Energy Coalition (2021) 'Success! 35,000 families are freed from energy bill debts in Catalonia', *Right to Energy Coalition*, 31 March. Available at: <https://righttoenergy.org/2021/03/31/35000-families-freed-from-energy-bill-debts-in-catalonia/> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

50 Right to Energy Coalition, *Success!*

51 Interview with Irene Gonzalez of Engineers Without Borders (ISF Cataluña) on 9 May 2024.

52 Watts, J. (2015) 'Uruguay makes dramatic shift to nearly 95% electricity from clean energy', *The Guardian*, 3 December. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/03/uruguay-makes-dramatic-shift-to-nearly-95-clean-energy> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

energy sector. This has put the primacy of the state-owned system and the progress the country has made at risk.

For decades Uruguay's domestic hydroelectricity production was propped up by imported oil. In 2010, successive increases in the price of oil, and therefore energy tariffs, led the newly elected left-wing government to make rapid steps to enact the *Política Energética 2005–2030* (National Energy Policy 2005–2030), which had been previously agreed by all parties.⁵³ Under this activity, wind power went from 0 per cent to 30 per cent in just four years, with rapid use of the wind energy produced enabled by the existing strong public energy infrastructure.⁵⁴ Just transition was a central approach to this policy, with training and retraining given to workers in carbon-intensive industries, and 50,000 new jobs created.⁵⁵ However, this rapid innovation diffusion enabled the reintroduction of private actors into the ownership mix. Today 80.8 per cent of wind, solar photovoltaic and biomass is owned by private companies, with the national company being left with fossil fuels, and thus vulnerable to greater changes in cost. The current government is taking further steps to privatise the energy mix, which is greatly opposed by the opposition party and the workers party. Public ownership was essential to achieving a rapid just transition, and as shown, further privatisation may put these efforts at risk.

In Brazil, following the election of President Lula da Silva in late 2022, labour organisations are pushing the incoming administration to reverse the privatisation of Eletrobras, the country's main power producer, and return it to public ownership. The privatisation of Eletrobras enabled ever higher dividends for shareholders (as a result of which, the company became the second largest dividend payer in the world).⁵⁶ Meanwhile, annual investment levels dropped by 80 per cent.⁵⁷ A commitment to reversing this privatisation, alongside increasing energy sovereignty and renewable generating capacity, included in Brazil's 2023–2026 governing plan. The Workers' and Peasants' Platform on Water and Energy (POCAE) also supports these commitments, which were included in the demands and proposals they sent to the Ministry of Mines and Energy following Lula's election victory. **Moreover, the national trade union centre, CUT Brazil, has been helping to shape the Lula administration's energy and environment policies. This has included the recovery of public energy workers' bargaining power and the proposed creation of a Social Participation Council.** According to CUT Brazil's Daniel Gaio, Luz González and Vânia Ribeir, this body would communicate and

53 Robbins et al., *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

54 Robbins et al., *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

55 Robbins et al., *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

56 Prado, M. (2023) 'Petrobras (PETR4, PETR3) foi a 2a maior pagadora de dividendos do mundo em 2022; veja ranking', *Valor Econômico*, 1 March. Available at: <https://valor.globo.com/financas/noticia/2023/03/01/petrobras-e-destaque-em-ranking-de-dividendos-global.ghtml> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

57 TUED (2023) 'Les syndicats brésiliens appellent à la renationalisation de l'énergie, pour revenir sur les privatisations de Bolsonaro', 4 March. TUED. Available at: <https://fr.tuedglobal.org/bulletins/bulletin-128-brazilian-unions-call-for-renationalization-of-energy-reversing-bolsonaro-privatizations> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

coordinate policy demands between trade unions, social movements and the new administration.⁵⁸

Moving from energy production to transition resources, in Chile, the world's second largest lithium producer, the Boric administration decided in April 2023 to create the National Lithium Company to take charge of the entire cycle of production, from exploration and extraction to the manufacturing of lithium products. Prior to the announcement, Movement for Lithium, a national coalition of trade unions, activist scholars and social movements, announced their support for the company, emphasising the need for collaboration between labour, communities and environmental organisations. In conjunction, President Boric announced the intention to involve communities living near the mining sites and to employ new technologies to minimise the environmental degradation of the salt flats ecosystem from which lithium is mined.⁵⁹ Soon after, over 100 trade union leaders developed a joint statement to put their weight behind 'the importance of a National Lithium Company that will take charge of the sustainable exploitation and value addition of one of the main strategic natural resources of our country, which constitutionally belongs to the State of Chile'.⁶⁰

At the same time, critics point out that the Indigenous Atacama and Lickanantay peoples were not consulted before the nationalisation, despite the fact that this decision will directly affect them. Moreover, the government plans are said to categorise 70 per cent of the salt lakes as 'replaceable', leaving them unprotected. This risks disregarding the rights of the surrounding communities whose livelihoods revolve around the lakes. **For civil society groups it is clear that the government needs to go beyond nationalisation by putting worker and community representatives in control of decision-making.⁶¹ While Indigenous groups are advocating for co-governance of the area, this has not yet been taken up by the Boric administration.⁶²**



INDONESIA TO THE PHILIPPINES

In Indonesia and the Philippines, trade unions have been key to fighting privatisation and centring public ownership as part of just transitions that tackle climate change.

58 TUED (2023) 'Reclaiming energy in Brazil: an abridged interview with CUT Brazil', TUED, 15 March. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/bulletins/bulletin-129-abridged-interview-with-cut-brazil-on-energy-policy> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

59 TUED (2023) Chilean labour movement welcomes national lithium company; calls for full state control, TUED, 3 May. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/bulletins/chilean-labour-movement-welcomes-national-lithium-company-calls-for-full-state-control> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

60 Peñaranda, L. (n.d.) *Brief: The Battle for Lithium in Chile*. Available at: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1A_DjS7NJDRvK0cL-JAil3QJ5YBgSZSW7B-IjEbEZaH8/edit (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

61 Lagunas, D. (2023) '“Water predators”: the industry behind “green” energy', *TNI*, 13 July. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/water-predators-the-industry-behind-green-energy> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

62 Interview with Gonzalo Gutierrez, professor at the University of Chile.

In Indonesia, state ownership of energy resources is embedded in Article 33 of the constitution, with the majority of the electricity sector being managed by the state.⁶³ Recent decades have seen a policy shift, leaving unions to fight privatisation, while a corresponding weakening of workers' rights has been threatening the energy sector.

One of the first major attempts to push through privatisation came with the 2002 Electricity Law No. 20, which would have enabled increased private sector involvement in the electricity sector. After consistent organising, union action led to the law being revoked.⁶⁴ Seven years later, **trade unions had another win when Electricity Law No. 30 outlined that electricity generation, transmission and distribution would remain in state hands.** On top of that, worker organising ensured that a caveat, which allowed for some privatisation of the sector, was ruled to be unconstitutional.⁶⁵

This tactic was employed again in 2017, when two energy unions, SP Perjuangan PLN Persero and Persatuan Pegawai Indonesia Power, contested a law aiming to reduce the role of the state in electricity supply. The court again agreed with the unions, yet some doors were left open to private actors.⁶⁶ In 2020, five trade unions united against the controversial Omnibus Law Employment Creation Bill, which presented risks to workers' rights and threatened privatisation of the electricity sector. The law would remove government oversight of energy sector planning and give private companies the ability to set tariffs, while also enabling unregulated environmental destruction. After four years of collective struggle, in November 2024, the unions won some key changes to the Bill, including mandating sectoral minimum wages. All efforts now focus on preventing the outlined electricity privatisation.⁶⁷

The Indonesian government has been finding ways to circumvent the mechanisms in the constitution that trade unions have used to protect the electricity sector from private actors. One approach has been creating holding companies to control electricity sector stock and assets. Shares are then sold through Initial Public Offering (IPO) to private companies.⁶⁸ In other words, stealth privatisation.

63 Trade unions for energy democracy (2024) Solidarity Builds for Indonesian Unions' Fight to Reclaim Public Power Utility. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/bulletins/solidarity-builds-for-indonesian-unions-fight-to-reclaim-public-power-utility> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

64 PSI Comms Team (2021) 'PSI Electricity Unions Fight Against Power Privatization in Indonesia Continues!', 8 September. Available at: <https://publicservices.international/resources/news/psi-electricity-unions-fight-against-power-privatization-in-indonesia-continues>. (Accessed: 29 November 2024)

65 ibid.

66 PSI (2017) Indonesian court judges electricity privatisation unconstitutional. Available at: <https://www.world-psi.org/en/indonesian-court-judges-electricity-privatisation-unconstitutional> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

67 Budiarti, I. (2024) Victory: PSI Indonesia Unions defeat dangerous Omnibus law, PSI. Available at: <https://publicservices.international/resources/news/victory-psi-indonesia-unions-defeat-dangerous-omnibus-law> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

68 PSI Comms Team (2021) 'PSI Electricity Unions Fight Against Power Privatization in Indonesia Continues!'

Indonesia's JETP is another mechanism being used to push privatisation of renewable energy, directly countering union proposals to expand the remit and capacity of the government energy company Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN).⁶⁹

Lobbying from multinational corporations has also played a key role in the hijacking of the energy transition agenda to benefit private interests.

These efforts have led to the inclusion of the Power Wheeling mechanism in the renewable energy law that is currently being formulated.⁷⁰ Power Wheeling enables the sharing of electricity power networks with PLN and private companies. It has been pushed for by private actors and their lobby body RE100, claiming that it will encourage investment in the sector and accelerate the energy transition.⁷¹ RE100 was initiated by 430 international companies with 120 companies in Indonesia including Nike, Microsoft, Google and Apple.⁷² All seeking to profit from the privatisation and commercialisation of the country's energy transition.

While the Indonesian government seems set on pursuing privatisation, the country's energy unions show what tenacity can achieve for the wider population.

In the Philippines, solidarity has been at the centre of struggles around the energy transition. One of the biggest trade union confederations, SENTRO (Sentrong mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Mangagawa — Centre for United and Progressive Workers), has been working for several decades to defend public energy as a key tool for protecting workers rights and strengthening climate action.⁷³

In 1969, the Philippines government created the National Electrical Administration responsible for reaching 100 per cent electrification across the Philippines. To achieve this, they set up electric cooperatives to supply electricity in rural areas, resulting in 119 member cooperatives today.⁷⁴ Yet in the early 2000s, the country developed a large-scale privatisation agenda for the power sector, including its energy cooperatives. Consequently, **in 2003, SENTRO, of which many of the cooperative workers were members, began organising to protect the cooperatives from privatisation.** Through political education and organising, its campaign developed strong alliances between workers and energy users, and an understanding of how both can benefit from the cooperative model.⁷⁵

69 Le-Lannou, A. (2024) Indonesia JETP's promotion of renewable energy privatisation opposed by unions and civil society, Bretton Woods Project. Available at: <https://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/2024/04/indonesia-jetps-promotion-of-private-ownership-of-renewable-energy-creates-opposition-from-unions-and-civil-society/> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

70 Sulistyowati, R. (2024) Power wheeling dan ruu energi baru mengancam monopoli listrik pln. TEMPO. Available at: <https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/power-wheeling-monopoli-listrik-pln-23523> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

71 Sulistyowati, R. (2024) Power wheeling dan ruu energi baru mengancam monopoli listrik pln. TEMPO. Available at: <https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/power-wheeling-monopoli-listrik-pln-23523> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

72 ibid

73 Mata, J. and Valentin, L. (2022) 'Towards energy democracy in the philippines', ENERGY DEMOCRACY, 10 November. Available at: <https://energy-democracy.net/transforming-the-philippines-trade-union-movement-into-a-climate-justice-movement/> (Accessed: 29 November 2024).

74 ibid

75 ibid

However, in the current model the electricity cooperatives purchase their energy from private corporations; much of it still comes from fossil fuels. The National Union of Workers in the Power Industry, an affiliate of SENTRO, has been fighting for electricity cooperatives to be allowed to generate their own renewable energy.⁷⁶ This would simultaneously reduce energy costs and energy-related emissions. Their campaign focuses on securing public funding for this demand.

SENTRO's climate action is rooted in broad-reaching just transition principles, as demonstrated by their campaigns on public transport and housing. In 2017, the government's new legislation banning diesel jeepneys was about to affect thousands of workers who lacked the funds to comply with the government's new mandate.⁷⁷ Another SENTRO affiliate, the Confederation of Transport Workers Unions, organised strikes which paralysed key cities. As a result, the government agreed to pause the legislation for three years. During this time the jeepney drivers organised into workers' cooperatives, using their shared power and partial government subsidies to purchase modern vehicles.⁷⁸ While this was a massive win for jeepney drivers, a comprehensive support package for these transport workers is still missing.

One of the most recent struggles supported by SENTRO is being led by community-based unions. Many urban poor families' homes are being destroyed as a result of extreme, climate change-induced weather. The community-based unions are demanding that all the new homes to which families will relocate have solar panels, ensuring energy is affordable. Yet local governments are resistant to funding this, so securing their support will be a key focus in the coming years.⁷⁹

SENTRO's bold visions for an inclusive just transition serve as inspiration to initiatives the world over.



AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES

For many years, trade unions have been speaking out against the failures of Australia's for-profit electricity policies, with the power sector either fully or mostly privatised in Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales. By summer 2022, after power bills increased by over 70 per cent, the federal government suspended the 25-year-old market. Calls have been growing for a public grid and a single government agency to sell power from generators to retailers or directly to users.⁸⁰

In 2022, the Australian Labour Party had a landslide victory in the State of Victoria, with support from the Victorian Trades Hall Council and a clear commitment to emissions reductions and public ownership of renewable generation.

76 ibid
77 ibid
78 ibid
79 ibid
80 Quiggin, J. (2022) 'The national electricity market is a failed 1990s experiment. It's time the grid returned to public hands', *The Conversation*, 21 June. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/the-national-electricity-market-is-a-failed-1990s-experiment-its-time-the-grid-returned-to-public-hands-185418> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

As a result, the government is re-establishing the State Electricity System (SEC), which prior to privatisation ran the integrated public utility, and is now planning to build and control an increasing amount of renewable power capacity. At the same time, **the State of Queensland announced increased investment in publicly owned renewables and a commitment to the Energy Workers Charter, backed by A\$150 million, to put the interests of energy workers at the heart of transition spending.**⁸¹

Moving to the United States, as a growing number of investor-owned utilities have been failing their users across the country, decades-long struggles for energy democracy and public ownership have been gaining traction. For instance, consider the case of private utility DTE Electric in Michigan. This utility is notoriously unreliable, with Michigan reportedly being the second worst state for power outages between 2000 and 2021, including outages that lasted over six days.⁸² Customers with lower incomes, in particular, are disproportionately burdened by poor service and high prices. Alongside frequent outages and severe delays in maintenance, since 2013 DTE has cut off well over a million power connections for non-payment. In response, activists are combining community organising with campaigning for public power. As Greg Woodring, president of the Public Power campaign in Ann Arbor puts it: **'We basically have two paths in front of us. The first is radically changing the way we do our energy system. The second is extinction.'**⁸³

In California, the equipment of Pacific Gas and Electricity (PG&E), another investor-owned utility, caused 31 wildfires, killing 113 people and destroying nearly 1.5 million acres of land between 2017 and 2022.⁸⁴ In the first months of 2023, a state judge ruled that it must face trial for manslaughter for its role in a 2020 wildfire. The Reclaim Our Power coalition has been trying to hold PG&E accountable, while pushing for a decentralised and democratised energy system across California.⁸⁵ **At the same time, the Let's Own PG&E campaign by the Democratic Socialists of America has been calling for democratic state control of PG&E, centring worker and community control.**⁸⁶

81 TUED (2022) 'Public energy victories in Victoria and Queensland, Australia'. TUED, 30 December. Available at: <https://www.tuedglobal.org/bulletins/public-energy-victories-in-victoria-and-queensland-australia> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

82 Michigan League of Conservation Voters (n.d.) 'Michigan's power outages, high rates, and unreliable service from DTE and Consumers Energy', *Michigan League of Conservation Voters*. Available at: <https://www.michiganlcv.org/michigans-power-outages-high-rates-and-unreliable-service-from-dte-and-consumers-energy> (Accessed: 13 September 2024); & Allnutt, B. (2024) 'Michigan ranks # 2 for power outages', *Planet Detroit*, 19 January. Available at: <https://planetdetroit.org/2024/01/michigan-ranks-2-among-states-for-power-outages/> (Accessed: 13 September 2024).

83 Schandavel, L. (2023) 'Utility companies' consistent failures and shady practices show why we need energy democracy', *The Real News Network*, 2 February. Available at: <http://therealnews.com/utility-companies-failures-energy-democracy-michigan> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

84 Schandavel, *Utility companies' consistent failures and shady practices show why we need energy democracy*.

85 Reclaim Our Power! Utility Justice Campaign (n.d.) 'About us: From monopoly utility to community power'. Available at: <https://reclaimourpowerca.org/about> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

86 Let's Own PG&E (n.d.) 'Let's own PG&E: it's time to take back our power', Available at: <https://letsownpge.org/> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

In the State of Nebraska, public power has been the norm for decades. Yet, these structures are not immune to creeping liberalisation and corporatisation. A brief overview of how Nebraska has maintained its public energy infrastructure for so long provides useful lessons. Between 1930 and 1945, a range of laws enabled a mixture of municipal, community and cooperative energy service provision.⁸⁷ Over the years, Nebraska's energy utilities have grouped together to run more efficiently, and have consistently offered affordable tariffs to customers.⁸⁸ In the 1970s, the merger of the three biggest power districts meant that each municipality or area didn't have to build its own energy generation infrastructure, building their capacity and strengthening their long-term function as energy utilities.⁸⁹ During the trend of liberalisation in the 1990s and 2000s, Nebraska refrained from unbundling its energy system, further supporting its ability to control tariffs without a competition framework.⁹⁰ **Through careful collaboration across scales, Nebraska has been able to maintain an energy system run largely for the public good.**⁹¹

Moving East, the Democratic Socialists of America have been campaigning in Chicago and New York City to democratise ConEd, their regional utility.⁹² By spring 2023, following years of struggle by the Public Power New York coalition, the State government of New York had approved a bill requiring the public New York Power Authority (NYPA) to generate all of its electricity from clean energy by 2030 and to offer low-to-moderate income customers a lower utility rate for renewable energy. **To achieve this, it is now allowed to build and own renewables while phasing out fossil fuels. According to one of the public power organisers, Lee Ziesche: 'It'll create a model of public power for the whole country, and it's really showing that our energy should be a public good.'**⁹³ Advocates aim to establish public-public partnerships, where an authority like NYPA can support public power campaigns and governments elsewhere.⁹⁴

87 Robbins et al., *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

88 Zullo, R. (2023) 'Affordable, reliable and sustainable: report compares utility performance', *Nebraska Examiner*, 19 January. Available at: <https://nebraskaexaminer.com/2023/01/19/affordable-reliable-and-sustainable-report-compares-utility-performance/> (Accessed: 13 September 2024).

89 Nebraska Public Power District (n.d.) 'Who we serve'. Available at: <https://www.nppd.com/about-us/our-customers> (Accessed: 13 September 2024); & Robbins et al, *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

90 Robbins et al., *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

91 Robbins et al., *Who Owns Power in the Energy Transition*.

92 Bozuwa, J. (September 3) *Public Ownership for Energy Democracy*, The Democracy Collaborative. Available at: <https://democracycollaborative.org/blog/public-ownership-for-energy-democracy> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

93 Uteuova, A. (2023) 'New York takes big step toward renewable energy in "historic" climate win', *The Guardian*, 3 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/may/03/new-york-renewable-energy-public-utilities> (Accessed: 16 August 2024).

94 Interview with Ashley Dawson of the Public Power Observatory, New York on 6 November, 2023. For more information about the Public Power Observatory, see: <https://publicpowerobservatory.org>.

This is Part 4 of the Reclaiming Energy report, which aims to unpack key strategies to strengthen energy democracy struggles the world over.

With the climate crisis escalating, labour and environmental justice groups are searching for systemic solutions. These solutions must uproot the logic of private profit, which is keeping energy systems from phasing out fossil fuels and ramping up renewables. Public ownership of energy can be exactly this: an urgent, viable and bold alternative to the failures of profit-driven markets and multinationals.

By employing a decolonial lens, we call for deprivatising and decommodifying public power systems as a condition for **shaping** pathways towards democratic governance and public-community partnerships across scale and territories. This means approaching the right to clean energy as inseparable from the right to land and resource justice.

Far from a silver bullet, defending and expanding energy as a global public good requires ongoing social struggles towards a sustainable energy sector that is deeply democratic and decolonial by design.

