

# **Pathways to Sustainability: A Neo-Gramscian Exploration of Just Transition Initiatives in Thailand and the Philippines**

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## **Abstract**

With the growing role of Southeast Asia as a strategic player in the global scene and the inherently transnational nature of issues and crises, this paper examines how the involved actors within the region navigate the complex and pressing issues that threaten the advancements of the region, specifically on the issue of climate change. In the face of just transition, developing countries like Thailand and the Philippines grapple with the dilemma between fully adopting just transition policies forwarded by multilateral agreements between different states and transnational organizations and focusing on existing issues like poverty, economic instability, and quality education. The objective of this paper is threefold. First is the identification of the national and multilateral initiatives of Thailand and the Philippines on just transition. Second, the examination of the impact of these initiatives on the economic and climate discourse of these countries. Lastly, this paper will provide a comparative analysis of just transition initiatives between Thailand and the Philippines framed after Winkler's Neo-Gramscian model of just transition to analyze the current progress of the just transition process of Thailand and the Philippines and identify how the status quo influences the said process. This theory highlights the creation of a new hegemony that focuses on the roles of change agents who are working together to facilitate social change. With the limited resources available for developing countries like Thailand and the Philippines, this paper discusses their progress and initiatives in the face of these constraints. The ongoing efforts in these countries underscore a commitment to fostering inclusive and sustainable pathways in the face of economic and environmental transformations catalyzed by the climate crisis.

**Keywords** Just Transition, Climate Crisis, Thailand, Philippines, Southeast Asia

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## 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, Southeast Asia has been regarded as among the fastest-growing economies in the world, as the region was able to achieve remarkable economic growth after the 2008 financial crisis. Despite the economic uncertainties in the global economy, the growth trajectory of the region shows the promising role of Southeast Asia as a strategic player in the global scene.

However, the issue of climate change threatens the optimistic outlook of Southeast Asia, especially among developing countries. Southeast Asia, due to its expansive and densely inhabited coastlines, significant agricultural industries, and sizable portions of its population living on less than \$2, or even \$1, per day, stands especially vulnerable to the ramifications of climate change (Asian Development Bank, 2009). The study of Wijaya (2014) brings attention to the heightened vulnerability of developing countries in the face of climate change impacts and associated natural disasters. The research suggests that these nations, characterized by specific geographical location, limited adaptive capacity, and other socio-economic conditions, experience a greater susceptibility to the adverse effects of climate change than their more developed counterparts.

With the consequential effects of climate change amplifying with each passing year, the pressing need for prompt action is becoming increasingly apparent. Governments worldwide are intensifying their efforts to reduce carbon emissions, promote sustainability, and enhance resilience. However, accomplishing the objectives of the Paris Agreement, which aims to restrict the global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius or less, necessitates an unprecedented shift in our existing practices. Abrupt changes can have significant repercussions on workers and society, as evidenced by past experiences, leading to the growing momentum around the concept of just transition (United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (n.d.), the concept of just transition aims to ensure equitable distribution of the significant benefits that accompany the transition to a green economy while simultaneously providing support to those who may face economic losses, including countries, regions, industries, communities, workers, and consumers. With the urgent need for swift and extensive action to mitigate the risks of climate change, new economic opportunities are expected to arise. While the core focus of a just transition is environmental in nature, it is also influenced by other structural changes that impact markets, such as globalization, the existence of global unions, and the impact of climate policies on industrial occupations (Stevis, 2021).

The Philippines ranked first in the 2023 World Risk Index, while Thailand ranked 23rd (World Risk Report, 2023). The risk assessment methodology is premised on the understanding that the occurrence of a disaster is not solely determined by the magnitude of the natural hazards experienced but is also a function of the degree of society's vulnerability to their impact (World Risk Report,

2023). The Philippines is among the most susceptible to natural hazards and climate change risks, including landslides, floods, droughts, and cyclones. In the past, these storms have resulted in significant economic impacts, causing declines in real GDP, exacerbating current account balances, and putting pressure on the fiscal sector. According to the 2017 World Bank report, typhoons and earthquakes cause an average asset loss of US\$3.5 billion annually (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Meanwhile, climate change is also significantly impacting Thailand, manifesting in various ways that affect both the environment and human activities. The country experiences an increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, and tropical cyclones, leading to economic losses, damage to infrastructure, and the displacement of communities (United Nations Development Programme, 2011). Thailand also confronts an alarming environmental issue in the form of PM 2.5 pollution. These fine particulate matter pollutants, measuring less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, pose a severe health risk as they can penetrate deep into the lungs, contributing to respiratory problems and other health complications among the populace (Lekprayura, 2019). The presence of PM 2.5 in the atmosphere has become a pressing concern, exacerbating the already intricate web of challenges stemming from climate change in Thailand. Thailand and the Philippines serve as compelling case studies for climate change and the need for a just transition, as both countries face substantial vulnerability to climate-related hazards. Moreover, Thailand and the Philippines exhibit stark socio-economic disparities, with significant portions of their populations living in poverty, which amplifies the challenges in adapting to climate change impacts and transitioning to sustainable practices.

Studying Thailand and the Philippines' climate initiatives offers valuable academic insights by showcasing examples of climate change challenges and just transition efforts in diverse socio-economic settings. This study aids in refining climate policies in Southeast Asia to be more inclusive.

Recognizing the vulnerability of developing countries like the Philippines and Thailand underscores the significance of targeted efforts and international cooperation to address the unique challenges developing countries face in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change. It is essential to understand and implement the just transition initiatives in the concerned countries to avoid potential disparities that may arise during the transition toward a sustainable and low-carbon economy in the face of climate change. The study aims to contribute to developing targeted policies that mitigate the adverse impacts of environmental policies on vulnerable communities while promoting inclusive economic growth by identifying and analyzing the elements of just transition. Specifically, this study aims to identify the national and multilateral initiatives of Thailand and the Philippines on just transition, examine the impact of these initiatives on the countries' economic and climate discourse, and provide a comparative analysis between Thailand and the Philippines framed after Winkler's Neo-Gramscian model of just transition.

This paper is divided into five sections. First is the introduction of the study, which contains the background, statement of the problem, and significance of the study on just transition in Southeast Asia, specifically in Thailand and the Philippines. Second, the theoretical framework made by Winkler on the Neo-Gramscian theory of just transition and how it is applied in this study will be discussed. Third is Thailand's multilateral and national initiatives on climate justice and the challenges and gaps in their initiatives. Fourth is the Philippines' multilateral and national initiatives on climate justice and the challenges and gaps in their initiatives. The fifth section is the comparative analysis of the climate justice of Thailand and the Philippines, framed after a Neo-Gramscian model of just transition, and the last section of the paper is the conclusion.

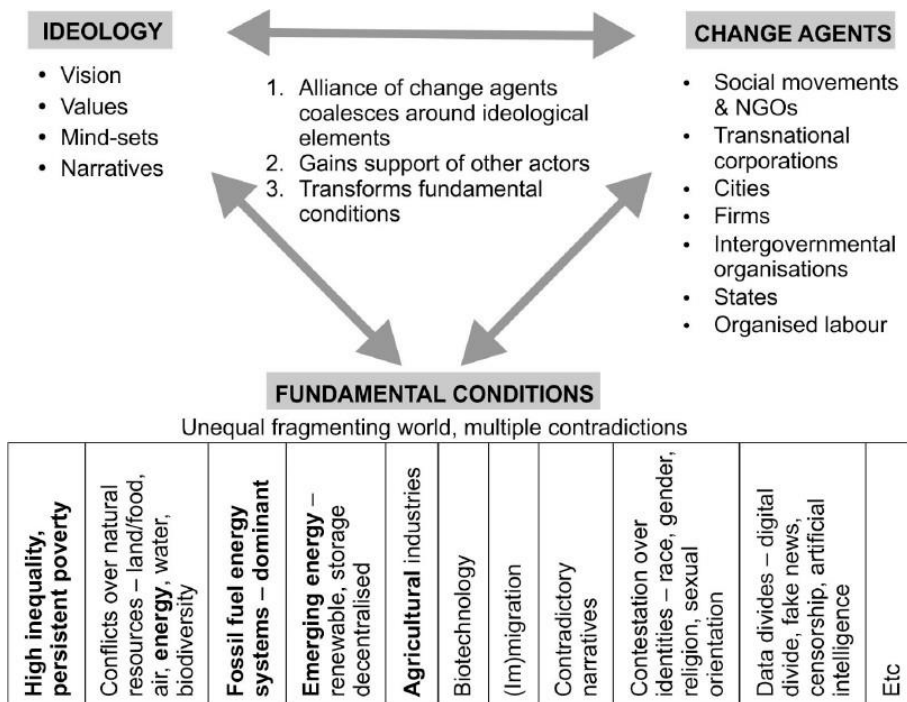
## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Winkler (2020) highlights that the Neo-Gramscian theory revolves around the cultural hegemony practiced among the ruling class. To either challenge or reproduce cultural hegemony, a group of social forces must come together around certain key ideological elements. The difficulty of nation-states to shift towards just transition is attributed to various factors such as social inequality, poverty, and the lack of access to modern services like education or sanitation in low-income economies. These factors may take precedence over global environmental issues like climate change in these regions. The current state of affairs has been shaped by prior progress, driven mainly by fossil fuels, resulting in elevated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Unfortunately, these high-emissions growth paths have resulted in increased poverty, ongoing inequality, and other obstacles reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Winkler (2020) emphasized that the developmental trajectories adopted by industrialized nations cannot serve as the blueprint for the future.

Examining the historical prerequisites for a particular class to establish hegemony over others, Gramsci adopts the Marxist notion of ideology as a basis. By delving into what he terms a "historical bloc," he identifies three key moments. The initial phase transpires at the production level, wherein the hegemonic class undergoes an economic revolution, enabling the transformation of the economic foundation and the establishment of new productive relations. This facilitates a fresh development of the productive forces and the ability to shape their future trajectory. The second stage involves a struggle for hegemony, wherein the class vies for control over state apparatuses, endeavors to reshape the political structure of hegemony, and utilizes it to further its own interests. The third moment transpires when the dominant class disseminates a worldview throughout society where other classes accept and consent to it as the natural order without considering it a product of hegemony, fostering a new form of social integration (Woolcock, 1985).

Winkler's Neo-Gramscian theory focuses on the creation of a new hegemony where social agents focus on working together toward the realization of a just transition. This necessitates the cooperation of all actors working together on a common goal. This is in contrast to a realist approach to international politics, where state egoism exists. Realism talks about the states' desire to pursue and prioritize national interest because the state's behavior is inherently "selfish, greedy, and power-seeking," which often leads to international conflicts (Heywood, 2013). This is incompatible with the concept of just transition because the realization of just transition necessitates the cooperation of different actors, setting aside personal interests and ensuring a consensus among social agents. Moreover, just transition is also incompatible with conservatism, as conservatives are autocratic, thus rejecting any idea of reform (Heywood, 2013). A just transition entails moving away from the current state of affairs, necessitating investments in technologies and industries that are both low in emissions and labor-intensive. This involves evaluating the employment and social consequences, ensuring affordable availability of energy services, addressing traditional sectors through worker retraining, and compensating communities facing potential disruptions in their livelihoods during the transition (Winkler, 2020).

**Figure 1. A theoretical framework based on Harald Winkler's (2020) Neo-Gramscian Theory of a just transition**



Source: Winkler (2020, p. 6)

Harald Winkler's Neo-Gramscian Theory of a just transition highlights the role of change agents in facilitating social change. The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the critical components of the theory, namely ideology, change agents, and fundamental conditions. As seen in Figure 1, these change agents are social forces operating across the political economy with representatives from civil society, business, and government. The theory suggests that just transition is more likely to succeed when these change agents work collaboratively to bring about the required changes. By utilizing the Neo-Gramscian framework, Winkler posits that a coalition of change agents comes together around a particular ideological element, the concept of a Just Transition. In this framework, this ideology makes these social agents unify using shared vision, values, mindsets, and narratives, which mainly revolve around the concept of just transition. This coalition is then able to garner support from other stakeholders, thereby establishing a new hegemony and ultimately transforming the underlying fundamental conditions: from regression to development, fossil-fuel energy system to green economy, from poverty to alleviation, and many more.

By analyzing the study from the lens of Neo-Gramscian Theory developed by Winkler (2020), the researchers can provide an in-depth analysis of the view of each country on the idea of just transition by taking into account the influence of prevailing cultural norms on power structures and policies related to environment and economic development. As illustrated by Figure 1, a framework created by Winkler (2020), the Neo-Gramscian Theory allows the researchers to identify and characterize the social forces and their alignment around key ideological elements that support a just transition. Moreover, the theory will also allow researchers to delve into the specific challenges of Thailand and the Philippines, such as economic disparities and historical influences that will enable them to provide a comparative analysis of why the process of just transition in countries like Thailand and the Philippines is similar or different from each other.

### **3. National and Multilateral Initiatives of Thailand on Climate Justice**

Thailand has increased its commitment to addressing climate change with the adoption of a series of new policies, innovative strategies, and policy actions that seek to promote climate justice at both domestic and international levels in recent years. To assess the impact of these initiatives and their progress towards achieving a just transition, this section will delve into the respective national and multilateral initiatives adopted by Thailand to identify the challenges and gaps encountered in the implementation.

### **3.1 Multilateral Initiatives**

#### ***Thailand's Third National Communication (TNC) to the UNFCCC***

Thailand's Third National Communication (TNC) is a manifestation of the country's commitment to implementing climate actions to greenhouse gas emissions and improve climate resilience as guided by the framework of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is an international treaty aimed at dealing with the pressing issue of global climate change. The 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement, which is a global agreement signed with the aim of bringing countries together to fight climate change, has been established within the framework of UNFCCC (United Nations, n.d.).

Specifically, the country shows its commitment and efforts to this collective climate action on climate change by detailing national information regarding the adaptation and vulnerability of the country as well as the measures they have adopted to mitigate impacts. The communication emphasizes how climate change is on the top agenda of the country considering the reality that Thailand is among the ten countries considered to be vulnerable to the long-term impacts of climate change. It also acknowledges the constraints and limitations the country faces in implementing policies and programs such as capacity-building constraints, high investment and operation cost, and lack of adequate regional climate models among others.

#### ***Mid-century, Long-term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy***

In the report Mid-century, Long-term Low Greenhouse Gas Emission Development Strategy submitted by Thailand in adherence to the 2015 Paris Agreement, the country enumerated its ambitious objective of reaching the highest point of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, aspiring to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions as soon as feasible in the second half of the century. The country further endeavors to attain carbon neutrality by 2065, seeking “enhanced international cooperation and support on finance, technology and capacity-building” to realize these goals (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2021).

This report comprehensively discusses Thailand's national circumstances, mitigation actions, and various country-specific strategies for long-term low greenhouse gas emission development. Interestingly, this report acknowledges that multisector cooperation among public and private sectors must be promoted in order for a paradigm shift to happen, leading to long-term sustainable development in Thailand.

### ***3.2 National Initiatives***

#### ***National Climate Change Master Plan 2015-2050***

The National Climate Change Plan of 2015 to 2050 in Thailand provides a crucial roadmap for defining the actions, objectives, and strategies of the country towards combating climate change and strengthening resilience. The commitment of Thailand to deal with the intricate problems posed in the attainment of a just transition is reflected in this long-term plan, which covers between 2015 and 2050. With the aim to provide a long-term national framework, this initiative ensures policy continuity across successive government regimes. Utilizing the Driving Forces-Pressure-Response framework, the master plan enumerates three primary purposes, namely (1) providing a long-term national framework, (2) providing a policy framework for the development of mechanisms and tools, and (3) providing government agencies and other affiliated organizations with a framework for a detailed action plan (The Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning & Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2015).

Specifically, three key mitigation strategies are included in the master plan, namely (1) climate change adaptation, (2) low carbon development, and (3) enabling the environment for climate change management (The Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning & Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2015).

#### ***National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for Climate Change***

The objective of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) encompasses several key principles with the aim of aiding the country in becoming resilient and adapting to the impacts of climate change. It proposes that a structured implementation framework be provided for the government agencies and related entities of Thailand both at the national and regional levels. The framework comprises best practices, methodologies, and guidelines that are vital to the development of sector-specific strategies, management plans, and actionable initiatives focusing on different sectors and geographical regions. Additionally, the NAP for Climate Change proposes to set up a budget allocation framework for financial agencies. It aims to ensure that sufficient funding is allocated to climate change initiatives in the country, with a view to facilitating efficient implementation and resource management through the establishment of financial guidelines and allocation strategies. Finally, this initiative aims at establishing a solid foundation to strengthen community resilience and preparedness against climate change. In this connection, strategies, approaches, and practices to enable individuals to cope with the changing challenges of climate change are prioritized. The plan aims to empower the citizens of Thailand so that they can face and cope with the impacts of climate change by promoting resilient approaches and preparedness (The Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning & Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2018).



### ***Alternative Energy Development Plan 2018-2037***

The Alternative Energy Development Plan 2018-2037 commenced in 2018, which corresponds with the 20-year National Strategy 2018-2037 of Thailand that emphasizes the promotion of energy production from the available existing alternative energy raw materials within the country. Specifically, its primary objective is to elevate the use of renewable energy and alternative energy in the form of electrical energy, heat, and biofuels to constitute 30 percent of final energy consumption by the year 2037 (Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency, 2018).

Since its enactment in 2020, the energy strategy of Thailand has primarily focused on amplifying the electricity-generating capacity, conserving energy consumption, providing sufficient natural gas, and managing various forms of fuel (Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency, 2018).

#### ***3.3 Challenges and Gaps in the Initiatives***

Although Thailand's visible commitment to mitigating the impacts of climate change is evident in the national and multilateral initiatives it has adopted and implemented, these initiatives remain inadequate in ensuring lasting benefits. Despite the relentless efforts in formulating initiatives on the issue of climate change, there are still challenges and gaps that need to be addressed while striving for just transition. The concept of a just transition has dual implications. On a positive note, it leads to favorable environmental results and opens up possibilities for new business ventures and job opportunities.

Conversely, it poses challenges for industries heavily dependent on carbon-intensive technologies, serving as a major source of employment, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises and a workforce lacking the necessary skills and financial resources for a shift to environmentally friendly production. Consequently, there is a potential risk of job loss or diminished income in these sectors (Kulkolkarn, 2018).

When it comes to practical implementation of its climate policies, Thailand has encountered a number of difficulties. The country still faces setbacks when it comes to implementing the initiatives and policies into practical action on the grassroots level, even though it has established a wide range of strategies for addressing climate change. This has been illustrated by how the overall climate performance of Thailand has been historically weak (Climate Action Tracker, 2022). Addressing these gaps, which range from insufficient coordination, lack of effective mechanisms for integrating climate policies, and resource scarcity, will help the country truly achieve its goal toward just transition and sustainable development.

#### **4. National and Multilateral Initiatives of the Philippines on Climate Justice**

The Philippines has emerged as a proactive participant in national and multilateral initiatives to address the critical issues surrounding climate justice and just transition. At the domestic level, the country has instituted various policies and programs to confront the challenges posed by climate change, recognizing its unique vulnerability to environmental impacts. Concurrently, the Philippines has also actively engaged in multilateral efforts, exemplified by its commitment to international agreements to acknowledge the shared responsibility of protecting the environment.

##### ***4.1 Multilateral Initiatives***

###### ***Greenhouse Gas Inventory***

One of the most effective strategies to combat climate change is to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. This approach has been recognized as crucial by the international community, with over 192 countries adopting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The ultimate goal of this convention is to maintain atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations at levels that would avert harmful human-induced disruptions to the climate system. The Philippine Government has demonstrated its commitment to this objective by crafting the 2010 National Greenhouse Gas Inventory through the hard work and dedication of the Philippine Greenhouse Gas Inventory Management and Reporting System (PGHGIMRS). Completed in 2019, this inventory was instrumental in projecting the Business-As-Usual emissions scenario used for the Philippines' First Nationally Determined Contributions (National Integrated Climate Change Database Information and Exchange System, n.d.-a.).

###### ***Paris Agreement***

The Philippines has made a significant move towards significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions by signing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This four-clause pact represents the country's commitment to adopting clean energy solutions, developing technologies and policies to facilitate a transition to renewable energy, and halting the construction of new coal-fired power plants. Additionally, the agreement outlines a commitment to strengthening domestic and international efforts towards a just transition from coal power, a crucial step in the global fight against climate change (Reuters, 2017).

###### ***End Coal Use by 2030***

During the COP26, 40 countries, including the Philippines, committed to cease using coal by 2030, representing a significant and forward-thinking step toward addressing the pressing global issue of climate change. This decision, often regarded as a monumental pledge, underscores the country's recognition of the environmental and social impacts associated with coal-fired power generation. The

Philippines aligns with the global movement towards sustainable and low-carbon energy sources by setting a specific target for phasing out coal. The move signals a commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and promote public health. This decision also reflects a proactive approach to the changing landscape of international energy markets and a commitment to fostering a just transition (Subingsubing, 2021).

## **4.2 National Initiatives**

### ***Nationally Determined Contribution***

Upon ratification of the Paris Agreement, the Philippine Government established a self-imposed deadline to present its initial Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) on or before 2020 (Climate Change Commission, n.d.). Following this, the Philippines has committed to reducing its projected greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 75% for the period 2020 to 2030. This reduction and avoidance will be achieved across various sectors, including agriculture, waste, industry, transport, and energy. Out of this commitment, 2.71% is unconditional. In addition to reducing emissions, the country is also taking measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change. These measures will be implemented across several sectors, including agriculture, forestry, coastal and marine ecosystems, biodiversity, health, and human security. The goal is to pre-empt, reduce, and address any residual loss and damage caused by climate change (United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

### ***National Climate Change Action Plan 2011-2028***

The Climate Change Act establishes a Climate Change Commission and provides budgetary resources for its significant responsibilities. These include formulating a comprehensive strategy and program in consultation with global efforts to manage climate change, integrating climate risk reduction into national, sectoral, and local development plans and programs, providing policy recommendations and key development investments in climate-sensitive sectors, assessing vulnerability, and facilitating capacity building. The National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) is a translation of the national climate change framework strategy. It sets out a strategic direction for the period 2011 to 2028, prioritizing key areas such as food security, water sufficiency, ecological and environmental stability, human security, climate-smart industries and services, sustainable energy, and knowledge and capacity development. These priorities align with the national agenda and underscore the critical role of addressing climate change in ensuring sustainable development (Climate Change Commission, 2012).

### ***Local Climate Change Action Plan***

As per the mandate outlined in the Local Government Code of 1991, it is the responsibility of local governments to exercise their devolved powers and collaborate with the national government to promote and maintain ecological

balance within their respective territorial jurisdictions. Moreover, based on the DILG Memorandum Circular 2014-135, it is recommended that local governments at the city and municipal level incorporate climate change adaptation as part of their regular functions. Additionally, these efforts should be supported by provincial governments through technical assistance, enforcement, and information management (Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2014).

The Local Climate Change Action Plan is a comprehensive strategy developed by local governments to address the critical issue of climate change. It encompasses both climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, outlining how LGUs intend to respond to the impacts of climate change and integrate them into local development plans. These development plans, including the land use plan, sectoral development plan, and investment program, aim to mainstream climate change considerations into local governance and promote sustainable development goals (National Integrated Climate Change Database Information and Exchange System, n.d.-b.).

#### ***4.3 Challenges and Gaps in the Initiatives***

The Philippines has taken the commendable step of being the first country in the Southeast Asian region to declare a moratorium on new coal and is implementing various measures to boost renewable energy. However, despite these actions, the growth of emissions cannot be completely halted. The moratorium implemented in 2020 still allowed coal power plants that were in the pipeline at that time to proceed, resulting in the addition of 2.6 GW of coal capacity by 2025. As per the existing policies, coal will continue to be the primary source of electricity generation in the Philippines until 2030 (Climate Action Tracker, 2023).

Although the government has already laid out its plan for a just transition, there is low awareness of Just Transition and transition policies among the grassroots. Moreover, even though different sectors acknowledge the need to modernize to give way for a Just Transition. Some stakeholders, like transport groups, state that the Public Utility Vehicle (PUV) modernization is an unjust transition and highlights the need for transition funds to support the affected sectors to really embody sustainable development for the country (Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development, 2018).

### **5. Comparative Analysis of the Climate Justice of Thailand and the Philippines Framed after a Neo-Gramscian Model of Just Transition**

Developing nations such as Thailand and the Philippines face a complex intersection of environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic development, making the pursuit of a just transition of utmost significance. This section conducts a comparative analysis of Thailand and the Philippines' just transition initiatives, using Winkler's Neo-Gramscian model of just transition as a theoretical framework. The Neo-Gramscian perspective offers a critical viewpoint,

highlighting the interdependence of power relations, cultural hegemony, and social forces regarding just transition policies. By utilizing this theoretical framework, this study aims to uncover how these nations handle the intricacies of just transition.

### ***5.1 Just Transition as an Ideological Element***

The Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (2018) has reported that while the Philippines may not be leading the global race to transition towards cleaner and renewable energy, it is one of the Asian countries that has taken firm and decisive action toward this goal. In 2008, the country implemented the Renewable Energy Law and has since adopted other policies that reflect aspects of a just transition. However, the Philippines' energy sector is facing a critical dilemma as it stands at a crucial juncture. Despite the country's rapidly growing economy, the majority of its energy consumption is derived from coal. Simultaneously, the Philippines has been spearheading the movement to restrict global temperatures to a maximum of 1.5 degrees Celsius. The country has also submitted ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), with a conditional greenhouse gas reduction target of 70 percent below business-as-usual (BAU) levels by 2030 (Verzola, Logarta, & Maniego, 2017). Just Transition as an ideological element has gained significant traction in the Philippines, with various stakeholders committing to driving investment in climate and sustainability initiatives. The goal is to achieve a climate-smart and climate-resilient Philippines by 2050, with a particular focus on accelerating the transition from coal to renewable energy. A Statement of Commitment has been signed by government leaders, business and financial sectors, and civil society organizations, pledging to support the availability and accessibility of financing mechanisms for climate and sustainability projects. This commitment is expected to hasten low-carbon development in the country and facilitate a smooth transition to renewable energy sources (Climate Change Commission, 2022).

On the other hand, Thailand is undergoing a significant economic transition that prioritizes ecological sustainability and adherence to the principles of a “sufficiency economy” philosophy. The country's highest policy level, the 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037), is focused on developing a green economy agenda, which is also reflected in its national policy and planning documents. These plans align with Thailand’s commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement, as stipulated in Thailand’s Nationally Defined Contributions (International Labour Organization, 2023). Despite Thailand's current practices and policies, the concept of Just Transition as an ideological element has not yet permeated the country's public domain. There is a pressing need to increase awareness among the general public, particularly those whose livelihoods are likely to be most affected by the planned shift away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy. Unfortunately, there is a lack of discussion regarding the significance of clean energy, and even less attention is given to the

social dimension of this transition. When there is clamor, it is often focused on the potential job losses in the energy and manufacturing sectors, which are perceived as a significant threat (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Asia, 2022a).

## **5.2 *Change Agents***

In the Philippines, various workers' groups and trade unions, such as Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, SOSYALISTA, and Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, have demonstrated a deep understanding of the gravity of the issues of climate change and labor rights in the country. The majority of these groups have identified the current exploitative economic system as the primary driver of these issues. This is because the pursuit of concentrated growth disregards the limits of both environmental and human resources, which exacerbates these issues. In light of the issue of climate change, it has been acknowledged by the leaders of transport groups that the transport sector has a significant role to play in the transition. However, they have demanded a genuine just transition and the need for a government subsidy or "transition funds" in response to the introduction of new PUJ models, which are estimated to cost around 1.6 million pesos, an amount that most operators cannot afford (Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development, 2018). Meanwhile, the adaptation of the energy sector to climate change centers around the key themes of power generation, energy efficiency, and conservation. The Department of Energy leads the Energy Technical Working Group, which gives priority to advancing renewable energy while diverting attention from fossil fuels. The sector underscores the significance of conserving energy and enhancing efficiency, in addition to exploring alternative power sources like natural gas and electricity for transportation and manufacturing. This policy focus holds promise for development, given the country's abundant renewable energy resources (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2009).

On the other hand, FES Philippines, a non-government organization, has proactively addressed the complex dilemmas that arise amidst the intersection of sustainability and justice. In this regard, the organization has collaborated with its youth partners to establish a Youth for Just Transition (Y4JT) Network. The primary objective of this network is to chart a viable course towards sustainability, which benefits all stakeholders while ensuring that no one is left behind. These youth partners have been advocating for significant reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030, with a goal of achieving net zero by 2050. Their efforts also aim to improve nationwide energy access, security, and sustainability while addressing existing systemic gaps and inequalities. Additionally, they are working to engage a broader network of young people in weather- and climate-vulnerable communities (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Asia, 2022b).

In the case of Thailand, there are also multiple stakeholders involved in addressing the issue of climate change and its impact on the country, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), independent

research institutions, international organizations, and even the business sectors. Among government agencies, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is a government agency of the country with a mission to forward a multifaceted approach towards the conservation, restoration, and regulation of natural resources and the environment, aiming to foster sustainable socio-economic development (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, n.d). This involves advancing strategies geared towards creating social and economic value while ensuring the preservation of environmental resources. Additionally, a pivotal objective involves fostering collaboration and engagement among various stakeholders, both domestically and internationally, within ASEAN and beyond. This inclusive approach seeks to integrate the efforts and inputs from diverse parties and sectors in managing natural resources and environmental initiatives. Moreover, the organization focuses on bolstering its proactive capabilities by strengthening systems, mechanisms, and data utilization. This enhancement aims at optimizing administrative processes and improving the efficacy of law enforcement, facilitating more effective implementation and management of environmental policies and regulations. Other government agencies that are also affiliated with the issue of climate change in the country include the Department of Alternative Energy Development and Efficiency and the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning.

Among non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI) is dedicated to addressing environmental concerns guided by the principle that collaborative alliances are instrumental in attaining sustainable development and enhancing overall living standards. TEI promotes an inclusive strategy that encourages collective environmental accountability by formulating environmental guidelines and bridging the gap between policies and practical steps, fostering substantial environmental advancements in Thailand. Moreover, the institute advocates for a participatory model that emphasizes shared responsibility among stakeholders in tackling environmental challenges.

### ***5.3 Transforming Fundamental Conditions***

According to Verzola, Logarta, and Maniego (2017), the subject of energy transition is a complex matter in the Philippines, given the country's archipelagic nature, high energy rates, susceptibility of energy infrastructures to extreme weather conditions, privatized electricity markets, limited government subsidies, and increasing demand due to rapid economic and population growth. The conflicting forces influencing the transition process include fossil fuel interests, climate change mitigation and adaptation advocates, and stakeholders affected by the transition. Resolving the inherent conflicts between the privatized electricity sector and governmental regulatory entities assumes paramount significance in realizing the objectives of ensuring a steadfast, economically viable, and dependable power supply. Furthermore, the government plays a pivotal role in facilitating a seamless

shift toward a low-carbon trajectory characterized by fairness for all. Achieving a just transition entails advocating for widespread accessibility, impartial allocation of costs and benefits, fostering consumer choice, promoting market competition, and ensuring equitable treatment of investors, irrespective of their scale. Additionally, it is essential to implement policies and regulations in a transparent and consistent manner to achieve a socially just transition. Providing that specific conditions and objectives are met, attaining this goal is politically feasible.

Similarly, Thailand faces the same challenges and dilemmas in terms of fundamental conditions. Since the adoption of the Energy Conservation Promotion Act in 1992 and the creation of the Ministry of Environment in 2002, Thailand has been gradually moving towards an energy transition. The country has made significant progress toward the renewable energy and energy efficiency goals set out in the Power Development Plan (PDP), Energy Efficiency Development Plan (EEP), and Alternative Energy Development Plan (AEDP). However, despite incorporating energy conservation policies, actions, and programs into a wide range of energy plans aligned with national development objectives, the country's accomplishments still fell short. (Sirasoontorn & Koomsup, 2017). Among the fundamental conditions that need to be addressed in order to make a just transition feasible include capacity limitations, fragmented authority, policy discontinuity, and lack of coordination between the public and private sectors. The challenges could be reflected in the Strategic Management Plan for Stakeholder Engagement 2024-2028, which included the 11 engaged sectors, aimed at bridging the gap between sectors by determining the stakeholders of Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT), managing and responding to the issues, expectations, and complaints of EGAT stakeholders at the organizational level, and assessing the adequacy of response measures for stakeholders, to establish additional measures to build trust and develop a strong relationship between EGAT and key stakeholders (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand, 2021).

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper provides a discussion of the national and multilateral initiatives adopted by Thailand and the Philippines and a comparative analysis of their efforts on the attainment of climate justice and just transition. The analysis of this paper revealed that the national initiatives implemented by both countries are heavily anchored from the multilateral initiatives they participated in in the international landscape. This shows how both countries express commitment to mitigating climate change impacts and their willingness to work collaboratively by acknowledging that climate crisis and Just Transition is a shared responsibility of every nation-state.

In understanding the efforts of Thailand and the Philippines in Just Transition discourse, Winkler's (2020) Neo-Gramscian model on Just Transition



provides that a social group must come together around certain key ideological elements in order to challenge the cultural hegemony that hinders the attainment of just transition. As he said, changed agents play a significant role in facilitating social change. For a just transition to succeed, these changed agents must work collaboratively to produce the required changes. Hence, this paper explored how, although both countries have multiple changed agents that support just transition, transforming the underlying fundamental conditions that are required in establishing a new hegemony has not materialized, given how the implementation process of the initiatives adopted is faced with challenges. This analysis emphasizes that as long as governments do not take into consideration the voices and the lived experiences of the people on the grassroots level, the sophisticated frameworks and plans developed nationally and internationally throughout the decades will only remain promising on paper. Moreover, the analysis also highlighted that multilateralism can be a core part of establishing a broad, global alliance for a just transition (Winkler, 2020) by strengthening the catalytic role of conventions such as the UNFCCC and other non-state actors.

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