

Reconfiguring Sustainable Energy Transitions: Can Social Equality and Investments in Renewable Energy be Aligned? (ReSET)

Initiative: Globale Herausforderungen

Ausschreibung: Global Issues – Integrating Different Perspectives on Social Inequality

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Climate change and rising social inequality are two of the biggest challenges of our time. The transition from fossil to renewable energy will be a key determinant of "who gets what, when, and how" (Lasswell, 1936). This project aims to illuminate how this energy transition can be leveraged to address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the transition to renewables (SDG 7) and, while doing so, also deliver on the reduction of inequalities (SDG 10). It argues that the infrastructures for renewable energy may, in principle, help to improve the level of inequalities resulting from carbon economies. However, recent evidence suggests that these potentials have not yet been fully exploited. Indeed, it suggests that incumbent interests are rapidly gaining control over infrastructure investments and, consequently, negatively affecting the social equality agenda. Against this backdrop, ReSET compares the four case studies of Germany, India, the Netherlands, and South Africa and develops a framework to analyse how the energy transition may produce social equality outcomes. Drawing on the concept of "institutional work" allows the team to investigate how a particular 'soft-ware' in the form of policy regimes determines the flow of investments in the 'hardware' of energy infrastructures, which then results in specific social equality outcomes. The researchers differentiate between how energy infrastructure is re-imagined to contribute to just and better equality outcomes, how it is then re-coded into policy regimes, leading to re-configured material infrastructures. The framework explicitly allows to develop a theory of change to improve social equality outcomes.

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