CFAL
Red para la Reducción de Combustibles Fósiles en América Latina y el Caribe

NETWORK FOR THE REDUCTION OF FOSSIL FUELS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (CFAL)

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Contents

1 Where are we going?

2 Why: Drivers of change

3 What has worked?

4 Challenges: Enabling conditions for Supply Policy

5 Recommendations

6 Notes

1 Where are we going?

Latin American Leadership in Fossil Fuel Production Reduction Initiatives

Several countries in Latin America are considered international leaders in their efforts to limit fossil fuel production. Given the need for other countries to adopt similar measures as part of a just transition, in this report we reflect on what we can learn from the experiences of countries such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile and Colombia and what are some potential future scenarios to advance this agenda. In this regard, it is critical to reflect on and share the learnings, challenges and lessons from these experiences on how to continue supporting and extending these policies.

CONTEXT

It is becoming increasingly clear that the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change cannot be achieved without more ambitious global efforts to limit the production of remaining fossil resources. Understood as supply-side measures to limit the production, transportation, or transformation of fossil fuels, either voluntarily or through regulation [1], fossil supply reduction policies include prohibitions and moratoriums on new exploration and exploitation, controls on the use of fossil fuel finance, or efforts to eliminate subsidies or divestments. These policies have been gaining momentum at the global level, resulting in the recent incorporation of this objective in the COP28 text. But for energy transitions to be fair, they have to reconcile the three dimensions of the energy trilemma: energy security, energy poverty and sustainability [2].

However, several reports and studies have shown a large gap between the expected production and exploitation of fossil fuels versus what is compatible with a trajectory of keeping global temperatures below 1.5°C compared with pre-industrial levels [3]. In fact, governments are now planning to exploit more than twice as many fossil reserves as would be consistent with this trajectory.

Against this background, several Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador and Chile, are leading the way in the fight against climate change by voluntarily leaving reserves of coal, oil and gas in the ground.

Costa Rica

- One of the first countries to renounce reserves of oil, imposing a moratorium in 2002 that different governments have kept in place.
- Founder member of the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA).

Colombia

- The government of Gustavo Petro has promised to leave reserves of oil in the ground.
- Colombia is also leading support for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and is a member of BOGA and the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA).

Ecuador

- The Ecuatorian pubic voted in 2023 to stop oil drilling in block 43 of the Yasuní national park, one of the most biodiverse places on the planet.
- If implemented in time, this decision could help limit the production and subsequent pollution of 726 million barrels of oil.

Chile

- Chile is not an industrial scale producer of fossil fuels but is advancing with a plan to decarbonise its electricity grid with the aim of having a grid that is 100% free of carbon by 2040.
- Chile is a member of The Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA), the No New Coal Compact, BOGA, and co-leader of the Climate Club with Germany.

Therefore, **this is a critical time to inform public policy debates about the learnings and challenges from these experiences** to continue supporting and extending these policies. Indeed, state officials and governments interested in developing policies for the gradual elimination of fossil fuels from their energy systems have emphasized the difficulty they face in moving forward due to the lack of similar models and experiences in the region. Thus, it is essential to expand access to timely information and policy analysis on how to build and sustain coalitions in support of these policies in the long term.

This report brings together the experiences and lessons derived from the joint reflection of professionals and academics from the Network for the Reduction of Fossil Fuels in Latin America and the Caribbean (CFAL) [4], as well as fieldwork in Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador and Chile carried out through the SUS-POL project (University of Sussex, UK) [5] – where more than 90 interviews have been conducted so far with various social actors (including the state, private companies and unions, leaders of trade unions, NGOs, local community organizations, the media, expert academics, and indigenous peoples) during the year 2024. The report addresses 4 key areas:

1. **Drivers of change:** What **motivates** different countries to move away from fossil fuel production?
2. What **policies have worked?**
3. What are the **challenges** that these policies have left behind?
4. **Recommendations** to promote these policies at the national level.

Photo by KK Muralidharan.

2 **Why:** Drivers of change

There is a long history of adopting policies to reduce the supply of fossil fuels in the region. However, policies have usually had motivations other than climate change. Among the factors that stand out for their adoption, we find:

- **The decrease in fossil reserves and loss of profitability.** It is critical to understand the need for transition in fossil economies that are not only vulnerable to international transitions, but also face a physical problem of declining quantity and/or quality of reserves making the fossil industry an uncertain business in the long term. Added to this is the uncertainty regarding the trend in demand for them and, on the contrary, the growing support for and adoption of renewable energies. This situation can be seen in the cases of Chile, Colombia and Ecuador.

- **Autonomy and energy security.** Given the relative or total dependence of certain countries on the costly import of fossil fuels, countries such as Costa Rica promoted energy transitions away from potential fossil production very early and sought other sustainable, cost-efficient energy sources available in the country such as hydropower. In the last decade, Chile has also developed its renewable potential in leaps and bounds. At the same time, exiting fossil fuels and developing strategies to reduce the risk of having stranded assets and strengthen the national industrial base for the production of renewable energies constitutes an opportunity for economic development.

- **Protection of biodiversity** and the conflict between the exploitation of oil reserves and other forms of relationship with nature and alternative economic models. For example, the framework of rights of nature and the presence of indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation in Ecuador or the ecotourism model in Costa Rica, have been key factors in supporting policies to reduce fossil fuel production. Given that there are critical conflicts between areas of high biodiversity and fossil fuel reserves [6], this is and could be a strong impetus for measures to reduce the supply of fossil fuels, while constituting an alternative development model.

- **The negative consequences on the environment and human health.** The extraction and transformation of fossil fuels (in addition to their consumption), produce not only pollution of ecosystems, but also serious problems to human health. The impacts of the release of fine particles that damage the lungs, sulphur gases, nitrogen oxides (NOx), mercury, in addition to the release of carbon into the atmosphere, are seriously toxic to human and ecosystem health. The tragedy of the sacrifice zones in Chile linked to the presence of coal-based thermoelectric plants has mobilized civil society and the surrounding populations [7].

- **The role of social and indigenous movements** has been crucial to articulating demands to limit the production of fossil fuels and resist new frontiers of exploration and exploitation. This was fundamental in the cases of Costa Rica thanks to the ADELA movement (Action of Struggle against Oil), in Ecuador with Yasunidos, in Chile with the Chao Carbón Coalition [8], and in Colombia through the work of the Fracking-Free Colombia Alliance.

- **The lack of resistance from the private sector has been key**. When the presence of the fossil industry is strong, it is much more difficult to implement measures to reduce fossil fuel production as seen in the cases of Ecuador and Colombia – compared to the cases of Costa Rica and Chile, where this industry has been virtually absent.

- **International alliances and pressures** to comply with agreements such as the Paris agreement or to lead post-fossil transitions have promoted these policies in the case of Chile and the Petro government in Colombia, as well as leant support to the moratorium in Costa Rica [9].

Photo by Clyde Thomas.

3 What has worked?

In addition to the importance of popular mobilization in driving supply side policies, at the level of public policy four major elements have helped to reach consensus and guide effective measures.

3.1

Academic and economic studies by recognized authorities and institutions that show the need and feasibility of transitioning. The four countries studied show the key role of having specialized studies to quantify the sociocultural, economic and environmental costs (particularly in terms of the effects on biodiversity) of fossil fuel production; as well as the physical limitations of their production. This has made it possible to open debates and present alternatives [10]. On the one hand, having concrete scenarios of the enormous cost of not transitioning to post-fossil economies has been essential to mobilize actions and resources [11]. On the other hand, studies that allow the viability of alternatives have been key in countries such as Chile and Ecuador, where the participation of economists in pointing out concrete economic estimates have promoted understanding of alternative pathways [12].

3.2

State transition policies with a view to the long term. In order to sustain complex transitions and adapt plans to evolving conditions, it is essential to try and secure cross-cutting agreements at the state level. The importance of this can be seen in the cases of Costa Rica (with the exception of the current government of Rodrigo Chaves) and in Chile, where political consensus has made it possible to sustain and increase ambition across governments over time.

3.3

Mechanisms for meaningful public participation. It is essential to involve civil society from the beginning of post-fossil transition plans, as well as to involve them in the monitoring of the roadmaps and commitments adopted at the different levels of governance. This has succeeded in engaging and educating civil society, while enabling them to be directly involved in the commitments made. As a successful example of public policy implementation, Costa Rica's *Citizenship Council on climate change* (C5) [13] ·stands out which allowed to involve citizens to supervise compliance with the objectives defined to achieve the country's NDC (Nationally-Determined Contribution).

3.4

Local just transition plans. It is important to use local long-term planning efforts to move away from the extractivist orientation of fossil fuels and towards more diversified and sustainable economies that help local populations develop and strengthen economic, sociocultural, and political resilience. An interesting initiative is the transition of Boyacá in Colombia, where the departmental government began long-term planning to diversify the local economy based on mining (particularly coal) and promote reindustrialization, food security, and tourism [14]. Another example is the *Energy Transition Research Incubator* of the University of Magdalena, a public university that has addressed the problem of transitions not only at the level of university training for new professionals, but has also been directly linked to local populations in transition processes to support them in the construction of local alternatives [15] .

4 **Challenges:** Enabling conditions for supply policy

Considering the experiences of these countries in the region, we identify multiple challenges that plans to exit fossil fuel production have to address:

- **Towards a just transition.** Stopping fossil fuel production requires comprehensive policies that consider economic, sociocultural, environmental, educational, and health impacts, among others. The impacts are not only on paid work and unionized workers, but especially on those who are more precarious working in informal economies (especially subcontractors as shown by the Chilean case), as well as women who are mainly engaged in domestic and care work. The concept of justice must consider the way in which different measures affect the well-being of people differently due to gender, ethnicity and class among other considerations.

- **Adequate diagnoses and plans to advance transitions that can address the energy trilemma.** Moving away from fossil fuel production means understanding the full effects of these changes on associated areas. Who is (in)directly affected? How does this affect occur? What elements are enabling the systematic shift away from fossil fuels? These and other questions must be answered strategically in order to plan changes and be able to adapt along the way. The case of Chile exemplifies very well the problems arising from the lack of state planning (for example, associated with inertia of the electricity system, transmission networks and storage systems), as well as the prioritization of the market in energy matters, which – even with public/private will to decarbonize electricity generation – have delayed progress and led to large losses of renewable energy.

- **Clear destinations and pathways.** Transitions require long- and medium-term plans over short-term populist policies, in addition to the search for cross-cutting social consensus between public and private sectors, civil society and indigenous peoples. It is essential to formalize and support initiatives in law to move forward consistently and independently of changes in government, thus avoiding setbacks in adverse political contexts, economic crises or wars. A good example of this is Chile' s *Climate Change Law*, which sets the goal of achieving GHG emissions neutrality by 2050 and establishes institutional mechanisms to advance and evaluate progress over time. On the other hand, Ecuador presents a unique case where the legal framework of rights of nature allows an agenda to be advanced consistent with the need to protect biodiversity and the environment.

- **Financing transitions.** Finding ways to address the problem of external debt that afflicts low- and middle-income countries is critical so that they can move forward and pay for transitions to cleaner economies and energy grids [16]. Likewise, the impact of fossil fuel production on the economies of countries such as Colombia and Ecuador shows the relevance of managing the fiscal impact of moving towards post-fossil economies in a responsible and just manner. Similarly, it is necessary to ensure that laws and transition initiatives are adequately resourced for their proper implementation.

- **Economic diversification, industrialization, and alternative rents:** The potential for economic diversification of territories [17], the challenges of fiscal governance in the exit from fossil production and viable alternatives to replace fossil fuel rents in the medium and long term must be considered. Along the same lines, creating opportunities and alternatives to promote industrial policies that support economic diversification is essential to create more resilient economies.

Photo by Jplenio.

- **Consider life cycles of initiatives and projects, as well as create spaces for ongoing re-evaluation.** A systemic vision is required to define alternatives, as well as to consider the life cycle of projects and infrastructures. In the case of Colombia, the lack of regulations and clear plans for the closure of mines and fossil fuel operations has generated socio-environmental crises in several territories in the region (such as the case of Prodeco in the department of Cesar in Colombia [18]). This shows the need to develop and strengthen standards for mine closures, considering not only the problem of environmental liabilities, but also the economic situation of the localities and the quantification of negative externalities suffered during the years of operation of fossil industries. At the same time, both the closures and the proposals for new energy pathways require permanent spaces for re-evaluation with all affected actors to make appropriate modifications and achieve the successful implementation of the initiatives.

- **Rethinking energy systems by understanding of socioeconomic dynamics (demand) and the availability of primary sources of energy (supply).** This means prioritizing the use and exploitation of renewable sources and efficient energy consumption to guarantee security and sovereignty in the medium and long term. At the same time, when promoting low-carbon energy alternatives, this requires a prior understanding of the benefits and challenges face by the fossil fuelled energy systems on which many countries depend.

- **Transitions must consider changes at the level of lifestyles of the populations.** Many transitions are not yet considering the level of changes in production and consumption patterns that integrated post-fossil transitions require. In doing so they must incorporate justice principles to ensure that the lifestyles of the affluent socioeconomic sectors that consume the most resources are the first to transition and generate opportunities for those who have fewer resources and whose lifestyles have less impact on the crises we are experiencing.

- **Integrated governance:** It is essential to rethink governance within the state which is usually atomized into ministries in order to implement cross-cutting interministerial measures. This is relevant to ensure coordination and joint and effective development of policies to exit fossil fuel production and include local governments in the affected territories early and on a continuous basis. *The Ministry of Environment and Energy* in Costa Rica is an example of the benefits of joint work between areas normally managed separately. In Chile, the Interministerial Committee for Just Socio-Ecological Transition is another interesting case of an effort to overcome atomization and build integrated spaces under the auspices of new institutions created for these purposes such as the Office of Just Socio-Ecological Transition (TSEJ).

- **Open discussions.** Energy policy is usually very closed and in several cases controlled by the State and its technical teams. This generates a challenge to open discussions and effective decision-making to all sectors involved, not only to generate public policies across levels that correspond to national and local contexts and realities, but also to ensure the effectiveness of the measures adopted. As we have seen in several countries, closed policies from the highest levels of power generate resistance, mistrust and fail to be implemented successfully. The cases of the *National Decarbonization Plan in Costa Rica* or the dialogue tables of the *Decarbonization Plan in Chile* 2018-2019, are examples of rather closed decision-making processes that failed to generate spaces for consensus among the actors involved to agree on concrete actions. Strategies can draw on a lot of experience, tools and strategies to improve and deepen binding and effective public participation in debates on energy transitions [19].

- **Develop multi-actor and multilevel spaces for dialogue.** Generating knowledge and content in languages accessible to all actors involved is key. This goes beyond the technocratic narratives that the problems of energy and economic transition should only be addressed by "expert" people and at a centralized level. Generating a dialogue of knowledge between science, local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge, and administrative and institutional management is a fundamental challenge to build bridges, understandings, and consensus considering different territories, cultures and knowledge. Efforts such as that of the Institute for Natural Resource Governance (NRGI) in Colombia to make inclusive narratives about just transition visible from different local communities [20], provide an example of a key strategy to open up debate.

- **Innovative strategies from below.** The case of Yasuni ITT in Ecuador offered for the first time a concrete scheme to finance countries in the Global South willing to leave their fossil reserves underground in exchange for economic compensation [21]. This model invites us to think about alternatives, driven from below, that allow financing transitions beyond fossil fuels without compromising the economic and energy security of countries. There are many proposals from civil society that should be considered more seriously in this regard [22].

- **Transparency in the governance and decentralization of the energy sector.** It is essential to develop transparency and accountability mechanisms to ensure the legitimacy and reliability of the initiatives implemented. That implies transparency in terms of funds committed, distributed and spent, access to information and participation in the evaluation of energy initiatives. It also refers to greater transparency in the processes of early participation and forming relationships with local communities, as well as the empowerment and monitoring by these communities. The policy of strengthening *energy communities* in Colombia is a good example in this regard [23].

- **Strengthening of decentralized and community energy.** The challenges posed by the concentration in power generation, and the delays in transmission and storage systems, as well as the diverse geographies of Latin America, and the high levels of socioeconomic inequality, show the need in the four countries analyzed to move towards systems to *strengthen distributed generation and energy communities* to decentralize energy systems and generate more resilient territories.

- **Ensure a balance between domestic support and international leadership**. Leading countries in this area face the challenge of achieving a balance between international and domestic support to implement commitments to exit fossil production. Currently, Colombia shows the gap between international discourse, applauded by many, and national politics, where such moves are highly resisted by several groups. Costa Rica has also reduced its commitment to BOGA under the new government due to lack of domestic support. At the same time, there is potential to explore domestic mechanisms to discourage polluting production such as the *green taxes* that have been used in Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica, and that could be adopted by other countries in the region.

5 Recommendations

Recognizing the challenges mentioned, we identified the following recommendations:

- **The costs of transitions must be understood and a fair and responsible division of them must be ensured.** While the notion of just transition recognizes that there are actors who have had to deal with the costs of fossil fuel extraction, as well as the differentiated impact that these transitions have in terms of job losses and income generation, it is important to consider that initiatives to transition also generate short, medium and long-term costs. A just transition must, therefore, consider the primary responsibility of those who have benefited most from the production of fossil fuels and have externalized the negative consequences of it.

- **The benefits of transitions must be shared.** Low-carbon energy projects need to directly benefit communities located near energy projects. Likewise, transitions must be thought of in terms of community and decentralized leadership that allows communities to lead solutions and learning, in addition to sharing economic and social benefits derived directly from the projects. This not only strengthens communities but also gives them resilience to territorial environmental and climate challenges.

- **Solutions must consider not only the energy trilemma but also the triple crisis** we are experiencing: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Addressing one to the detriment of any of them jeopardizes the success of initiatives.

- **Reorient ministries and the functioning of public policies** to address the cross-cutting challenges of problems such as climate change and economic and social changes required by post-fossil transitions.

- **The need to significantly strengthen mechanisms for popular consultation and social inclusion**, ensuring the consistent participation of all actors directly or indirectly affected, and the use of other tools of direct democracy in line with local realities. Transparency and accountability mechanisms, just transition plans and financing are also key.

- **Repair and regeneration.** Given the polluting effects and long-term socio-environmental damage of public and private fossil industries, it is essential to develop medium and long-term strategies that permanently change the logic of development and public policies towards affected territories, centring issues of repair and regeneration.

Protest in 2013 demanding the permanent closure of the Bocamina II thermoelectric plant in Coronel, Chile. Credits: Chao Carbón Coalition

- **Long-term systemic planning.** Planning must consider from the beginning the challenges of regulations and adjustments to current legislation, as well as the training of public officials for effective implementation. Moving away from fossil fuels requires just and interconnected energy and economic transitions, as well as changes in mindset and organizational culture. In turn, these must be adapted to the reality of different territories, with alternatives for economic and energy diversification that generate resilience.

- **Assessment of the impact on existing infrastructure.** The problem of stranded assets and other infrastructure affected by transitions must be considered in the original planning, not only to develop adequate plans and management for the retirement of fossil infrastructure and the costs that these assets imply; but also as an opportunity to innovate and be able to use them safely, effectively and efficiently.

- **Enhance and strengthen continental and international collaboration to protect the region's biodiversity and natural resources.** There are already initiatives that can be supported, such as the campaign for an Amazon free of fossil fuels, or the alliance for the Greater Caribbean to move away from fossil fuels [24], among others, which allow countries to permanently strengthen local and national efforts towards just transitions.

- **Energy integration in the region.** Central America's energy integration shows the relevance of expanding these efforts in South America to achieve more resilient regional systems, as well as accelerate transitions and meet climate commitments by fostering bi- and multilateral cooperation.

- **Fossil supply reduction policies cannot ignore the other challenges facing Latin American states today.** The region has multiple challenges that affect the development of these policies and that cannot be ignored, such as high levels of inequality, corruption, poverty, deforestation, violence and drug trafficking, the persecution of indigenous and environmental leaders, and the criminalization of protest, among others. Therefore, supply side policies must be comprehensive policies that look at the territories as a whole.

6 Notes

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About CFAL

Network for the Reduction of Fossil Fuels in Latin America and the Caribbean (CFAL)

We are a network of academics, activists and practitioners from across Latin America, the Caribbean and beyond interested in sharing research, ideas, resources to support one another in efforts to accelerate transitions away from fossil fuels in a socially and ecologically just manner.

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