

ENERGY JUSTICE

When enough is not enough

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Sufficientarianism in the context of energy is the notion that the energy justice discourse should look beyond the concept of equity to insist on providing sufficient energy for everyone in the world. Exploring this idea, Chukwuka Monyei in Nigeria and colleagues in South Africa and the United Kingdom show that in the absence of clear definitions of what constitutes 'sufficient' energy and mobility to higher-energy-consumption lifestyles, sufficientarianism cannot be fair to the developing world.

The researchers document how the current 'western' narrative of the energy transition conflates the problem of a lack of access to energy for citizens in the developing world with the problem of inadequate purchasing power in developed nations because of ambiguities in the definition of sufficient energy. Through an analysis of South Africa's Solar Home System programme, they show that an inadequate definition of energy sufficiency condemns the already poorer households to further unreliable and weather-dependent energy access, with no chance for mobility to higher-energy-use lifestyles. Moreover, they show how flaws in the narrative of energy justice have been a contributing factor towards off-shoring of emission reductions in programmes such as the Clean Development Mechanism (which allowed investments in clean energy projects in the developing world to off-set emissions at home), and have let Western nations avoid any kind of penalties for high emissions. The researchers instead propose a vision of an 'energy just' realistic utopia that brings together the concepts of emissions reduction and constrained egalitarianism, libertarianism, utilitarianism and sufficientarianism. In the truly energy-just transition, they suggest that there should be more room for hybrid renewable–fossil fuel-based systems for ensuring access to sufficient energy in the developing world.

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