

A greener, more resilient and just recovery for South Africa, post Covid-19

By [Henk Sa](#)

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An important window of opportunity exists during the development of South Africa's Covid-19 recovery plans to drive a simultaneous transition to a sustainable, inclusive, resilient, just and resource-efficient society, employing the existing blueprint of the EU Green Deal to drive renewable energy, low-carbon technologies, sustainable infrastructure and green jobs.



Henk Sa, co-founder and partner at EcoMetrix Africa

Leaders around the world are calling for the sustainable restructuring of economies in response to the Covid-19 crisis, as opposed to allowing the crisis to disrupt the transition towards clean energy and a more sustainable, greener future for all.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen urges that the “world must not fall back into old habits of environmental degradation”, while, also notes that “government policies need to be put in place to prevent a pause in investment that will compromise the clean energy transition towards a more sustainable and greener future”.

Delaying an already urgent issue

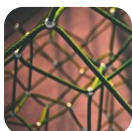
A pause in our environmental and climate response plans could mean we risk climate change issues moving to the bottom of the agenda again like it did after the 2008 financial crisis. Postponing important climate change events and urgent interventions or pausing green commitments in response to the Covid-19 crisis, further delays an already urgent issue and will only require more drastic and more expensive interventions in future to prevent

catastrophic climate change.

Rather than a hiatus on green spending and holding tightly onto green purse strings, a portion of the money earmarked for Covid-19 relief would be best spent on long-term investment in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies, sustainable infrastructure and creating green jobs.

Fortunately, the blueprint already exists in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the European Commission's European Green Deal. Von der Leyen highlighted that the EU Green Deal should be used “as a ‘compass’ to help the bloc turn this crisis into an opportunity to rebuild our economies differently and make them more resilient”.

With the EU Green Deal as a guide, South Africa's post-Covid-19 recovery plans - incorporating urgent climate action and investment in green technologies - can drive and accelerate the country's recovery and transition to a just, resilient and resource-efficient society, environment and economy.



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Decouple economic growth from emissions

Moving forward, it is crucial for South Africa to decouple its economic growth from emissions growth as part of the long-term recovery plans for the country. An investment in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies could generate huge economic benefits, while simultaneously tackling the climate crisis. This requires phasing out and divesting from fossil-based emission-intensive industries and embracing sustainable investments that shift the country from high emissions to a low-carbon economy.

Shifting the energy mix towards renewable sources such as biofuels will also deliver energy efficiency improvements and cost savings – a sure way to fire up the economic recovery while future-proofing our society. Coal-fired electricity is no longer the lowest cost form of electricity - since 2008, solar, wind and other cleaner energies have become cheaper with more efficient technologies, while also having a beneficial impact on the environment and the health of our communities.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

Ensuring a more just, inclusive recovery

The investment in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies will also ensure a more just and inclusive recovery. Energy is key to a prosperous economy. Without reliable electricity to access news, information and education, millions of South Africans are literally left in the dark. A commitment to renewable energy as part of our Covid-19 recovery plans will address the energy needs of millions of people without access to electricity. Sustainable infrastructure such as solar panels on the roofs of houses, schools and hospitals will generate clean and reliable electricity to cook, read and learn, changing the livelihoods of millions of the most vulnerable people, while also allowing South Africa to honour its international climate change commitments.

Investing in green jobs

An investment in creating green jobs should also feature strongly in stimulus packages and recovery plans. The Covid-19 pandemic has left millions more people jobless, exposing how fragile and vulnerable our economy is. Investing in green jobs can provide long-term resilience and sustainability that will strengthen our economy, protect our environment and uplift our people.

These are unprecedented times, calling for unprecedented approaches. Stimulus packages and recovery plans that include investments in renewable energy, low-carbon technologies, sustainable infrastructure and green job creation will ensure this

crisis can be transformed into an unprecedented opportunity to create a sustainable, inclusive, resilient, just and resource-efficient society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Henk Sa is a co-founder and partner at EcoMetrix Africa and possesses a profound knowledge of climate change projects and market dynamics. He has worked for companies, government agencies and international organisations across the globe making him a sought-after advisor on the development and application of energy and climate change mitigation policies and measures.

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