

Urgent Action Can Turn The Tide on The Impacts of Climate Change

Lebogang Mulaisi, COO at the Presidential Climate Commission, is a trailblazer in the fight for environmental justice. As a labour commissioner at COSATU, she championed policy initiatives for a just transition to a low-carbon economy and her blueprint guides workers through this transition via collective bargaining.

Her proudest moment came with her appointment to the National Development Agency Board by President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2021, which is a testament to the fulfilment she finds in trade union activism—a journey that has not only far surpassed her initial expectations but one she never expected to contribute to society at the scale she does now.

Lebogang, currently pursuing a PhD in economics at the University of Johannesburg, emphasises the importance of patience and self-compassion, believing there is no age limit to making a meaningful impact. “Be consistent and show up even when you don’t feel like it — it pays off in the end.”

In this exclusive interview, Lebogang talks about her role as the COO for the Climate Commission, the Commission’s mandate, and highlights some of its most memorable interventions or projects.

The Role

As COO, Lebogang spearheads strategic planning for the PCC secretariat, ensuring cohesive alignment with annual plans. She actively manages team performance and facilitates professional development, providing guidance on effective governance. Additionally, she oversees comprehensive reporting to key stakeholders, including the Commission, the Presidency, NEDLAC, Parliament, and other essential entities.

The Mandate

The PCC, established by President Cyril Ramaphosa, operates as an independent statutory body with a multifaceted role in overseeing and facilitating a just and equitable transition towards a low emissions and climate-resilient economy. The Commission’s key objectives include creating a social partnership for a just transition, defining a vision for this transition, conducting independent analysis on climate change impacts, monitoring progress toward goals, and engaging with diverse stakeholders across government, business, labour, academia, communities, and civil society.

The Most Memorable Interventions/Projects

The Komati Recommendations report is Lebogang’s most impactful experience. Interactions to a low-carbon economy” with the Komati community and workers began in January 2022 during the development of the national Just Transition Framework (JTF). These discussions addressed concerns about the closure and repurposing of the Komati Power Station, specifically focusing on the fairness of the process. This led to an investigation into the Komati process by President Ramaphosa, the PCC Chair, with a focus on justice outcomes.

“While the closure of the Komati coal power station was primarily due to economic reasons related to its age rather than the country’s decarbonisation agenda, it provides valuable insights for future Just Energy Transition (JET) projects in South Africa.”

Any 'Aha' Moments as COO?

“Yes! My Aha moment culminates from my broad involvement in the Commission more broadly. I have come to the realisation that environmental considerations are going to be part of economic planning moving into the future. This means that entities like the PCC will become increasingly important moving into the future.”

Your Focus On Ending Poverty Through Job Creation is Evident. How Does The Climate Commission Support This Goal, and What Steps Ensure Fair Wages During The Transition To A Low-Carbon Economy?

Lebogang explains that the JTF for South Africa highlights three principles of the just transition (Procedural, Distributive and Restorative justice).

“Adhering to procedural justice is how we ensure fair wages during the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Procedural justice ensures that through social dialogue with workers and their employers fair wages can be negotiated during processes of collective bargaining.”

The PCC's Electricity Recommendation Signals A Potential Structural Shift In Electricity Planning For South Africa. What Could This Mean For Labour?

The electricity recommendations propose a substantial investment in renewable energy and grid upgrades, emphasising alignment with the JJTF in electricity planning.

This alignment aims to prioritise job benefits through industrial policy, economic diversification, labour market interventions for skills development, and worker support during the transition. Stakeholder engagements underscored the need for an increased focus on job creation by incentivising green industrial development, economic diversification, and localising key transition value chains, particularly in at-risk regions. Additionally, investing in human resource and skills development emerged as a top priority.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policies At The Climate Commission

While it is evident that women are empowered to assume leadership roles, Lebogang emphasises that the PCC secretariat fosters a diverse culture with broad inclusion of various population groups. “As a young and vibrant organisation, we consciously recruit young people.”

Collaboration Is Key In Addressing The Climate Crisis. Can You Share Examples of Successful Partnerships You Have Formed Across Sectors To Advance The Climate Commission's Goals?

As a multi-stakeholder body with broad representation from business, government, local government, youth, faith based organisations, labour and civil society, it is the Commission’s mandate to partner with the stakeholders to deliver on a mandate of a just transition. “It is through these engagements and partnerships, that the Commission is able to develop outputs that have been engaged upon by stakeholders, thus adopting recommendations that take into consideration the voices of stakeholders.”

What Are You Most Looking Forward To In The Coming Year?

“I am looking forward to more stakeholder engagements with the PCC’s broad stakeholder network especially on the just transition implementation plan that is the next step from the JTF.”

Please Share A Message Of Inspiration With Our Readers

For Lebogang, climate change is not about changes in the weather in some distant future, "It is already with us!" Globally, extreme weather such as droughts and floods, uncertain rainfall and rising sea levels are experienced. "In South Africa we are seeing increasing floods in areas such as Gauteng and KZN. These changes to the climate are a threat to our health, jobs, and livelihoods.

Urgent action can turn the tide on the impacts of climate change, to the benefit and the survival of our planet as a whole, "she concludes.

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