Journal of Energy and Natural Resource Management (JENRM), Vol. 11, No. 1, 01-5, 2025
Received: May 27, 2025; Revised: August 28, 2025.; Accepted: August 29, 2025

Impact of the Just Energy Transition on Employment in the Carbon-Intensive Energy Sector in Sunyani, Ghana: A Case Study of the Informal Charcoal and Liquid Fuel Market

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Abstract
This study examines the employment impacts of Ghana's shift to low-carbon energy on informal workers in Sunyani, focusing on charcoal producers, traders, and liquid fuel vendors. Using the Political Economy of Energy Transitions and Just Transition Theory, it analyzes data from a 298-respondent survey through descriptive statistics and multivariable regression. The workforce, characterized by low education, concentrated incomes, and sole reliance on current jobs, faces significant vulnerability. Charcoal producers are at higher risk of displacement (AOR = 1.91, p = 0.034), and while policy awareness is common, it increases perceived insecurity without compensatory measures. However, coherent policy inclusion, measured by a validated four-item Policy Inclusion Index (KR-20 = 0.78), enhances access to support (AOR = 1.62, $p < 0.001$) and reduces displacement risk (AOR = 0.81, p = 0.006), especially when paired with tangible assistance. The study highlights a conversion mechanism: effective inclusion requires sector-sensitive interventions, like stipended reskilling and concessional credit for charcoal producers, or lighter business support for vendors. Institutionalizing this inclusion–conversion pipeline is critical for balancing Ghana's decarbonization goals with social equity, ensuring sustainable livelihoods for informal workers in high-friction energy sectors.

Keywords
just transition, informal energy sector, charcoal, liquid fuel retailing, Ghana, procedural justice, distributive justice

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DOI: 10.26796/jenrm.v11i1.297
Received: July 27, 2025; **Received in revised form:** September 7, 2025; **Accepted:** September 20, 2025; **Published:** September 30, 2025

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1. Introduction

Global shifts toward low-carbon energy promise significant environmental benefits but can also generate concentrated socio-economic risks for the livelihoods of workers linked to fuelwood and liquid fuels. A *just transition*

frames decarbonisation as a process that must distribute costs and benefits fairly and protect vulnerable groups through decent work and social protection (ILO, 2015). While renewable energy deployment is expanding rapidly, projected to support tens of millions of jobs by 2030 (IRENA, 2021), evidence shows these gains are unevenly distributed across regions, sectors, and skill profiles; workers in carbon-intensive and informal segments are especially exposed when policy signals are not paired with mitigation measures (Carley & Konisky, 2020; Hanna, Green, & Lazell, 2024; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). These risks are amplified in sub-Saharan Africa, where informal jobs constitute the majority of employment and access to reskilling, finance, and social insurance is limited (African Development Bank, 2022; Ononogbu, 2022). Justice in Africa's transitions must therefore address poverty reduction and gender and rural equity alongside emissions goals (Phillips & Newell, 2021; Energy for Growth Hub, 2023).

Ghana exemplifies this tension. The National Energy Transition Framework aims for net-zero emissions by 2070, implementing strategies for clean cooking and electrified mobility (Ministry of Energy, 2022); however, petroleum and biomass continue to dominate the country's energy mix. As the primary cooking fuel for millions of households and a significant share of the country's Total Energy Supply (TES), charcoal supports a considerable amount of informal employment in production, transportation, and commerce (World Bank, 2022; Agyeman, Oduro, & Antwi-Boasiako, 2019; Brobbey, Sumberg, & Kwadzo, 2019). Retailing petroleum products (liquid fuels, such as petrol, diesel, kerosene, paraffin oil, and premix fuel) by informal vendors also fills service gaps but faces tightening regulation and market shifts (Amoako-Tuffour & Asamoah, 2021). Without targeted safeguards, transition policies risk displacing livelihoods in these segments.

Sunyani—Bono Region's commercial hub—offers a pertinent site: it bridges rural charcoal production zones and urban demand while hosting a dense network of informal liquid fuel retailers. The national transition rhetoric has not translated into tangible protections for informal energy workers, echoing a pattern where participation is emphasised but redistribution lags (Swilling, Musango, & Wakeford, 2016).

This study applies the Political Economy of Energy Transitions (PEET) and Just Transition Theory (JTT) to examine how structural vulnerabilities, policy awareness, and procedural inclusion shape employment risks and support access for charcoal producers/traders and informal liquid fuel retailers in Sunyani. The study explores the following objectives: (1) assesses the structural vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities of informal energy workers in Sunyani's charcoal and liquid-fuel retail segments; (2) analyses sectoral differentiation in the socio-economic impacts of Ghana's energy transition—examining how displacement risk and adaptive capacity differ between charcoal producers, traders, and liquid-fuel retailers; (3) evaluates how procedural inclusion and support mechanisms interact with sector-specific barriers to reduce vulnerability and foster a just transition. In particular, the study tests whether sector-sensitive inclusion—rather than generic participation—drives equitable outcomes across occupational groups. Therefore, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What demographic and socio-economic characteristics define informal energy workers in Sunyani, and how do these shape vulnerability or adaptive capacity? (2) How is Ghana's energy transition influencing livelihood outcomes (income, job security, displacement risk), and what roles do policy awareness and willingness to shift play? (3) To what extent do procedural inclusion and support mechanisms affect access to resources, perceptions of government responsiveness, and resilience across occupational groups? By providing quantitative, city-level evidence from a predominantly informal energy economy, this study fills a critical gap in Ghana's just-transition discourse. Findings inform municipal and national policy on how to pair inclusion processes with sector-sensitive, distributive support, especially for charcoal producers, so that decarbonisation advances both environmental and social objectives.

2. Literature Review

Global transitions from fossil fuels to low-carbon systems are reshaping employment worldwide. While macro-level benefits such as emissions reduction and new green jobs are widely highlighted (IRENA, 2021), labour impacts in developing countries' contexts remain under-examined. Informal energy sectors like charcoal production and petroleum products retailing occupy a vulnerable position, yet they are often omitted from transition planning. This review synthesises literature through two complementary frameworks, the Political Economy of Energy Transitions (PEET) and Just Transition Theory (JTT), to analyse how structural exclusion and distributive justice shape outcomes for informal workers. The Political Economy of Energy Transitions (PEET) emphasises that transitions are political processes shaped by institutional logics, vested interests, and financing structures (Sovacool, 2016; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). Evidence shows that when policies prioritise centralised, capital-intensive projects, marginalised groups are excluded. In Indonesia, renewable energy expansion created urban jobs but left coal-dependent rural workers unemployed (Purwanto et al., 2024). In South Africa, informal coal traders faced immediate displacement despite formal "just transition" frameworks (Schneider, Swilling & Eide, 2021). Ghana illustrates similar dynamics. Charcoal and informal liquid fuel vendors remain outside planning structures, reflecting state and donor preferences for formalised energy markets (Agyeman et al., 2019; Amoako-Tuffour & Asamoah,

2021). This exclusion is not incidental but rooted in institutional and financing biases that replicate structural marginalisation (Chapman et al., 2021). PEET thus highlights why transition risks disproportionately threaten informal workers in Sunyani. The Just Transition Theory (JTT) focuses on distributive and procedural justice, requiring that vulnerable workers share fairly in the benefits of decarbonisation and be meaningfully included in decision-making (Heffron & McCauley, 2018). Global evidence shows mixed realisation of these principles. In Tanzania and Malawi, charcoal bans without support measures deepened poverty among rural households (Chidumayo & Gumbo, 2015; Zulu & Richardson, 2013). Conversely, in Chile, structured community participation led to the provision of stipends and reskilling opportunities for informal carbon-intensive energy workers, strengthening trust and resilience (Urquiza & Billi, 2020). Selective inclusion is common. Middle-income countries often extend just transition benefits only to formal oil and gas workers (Saha, Kuriakose & de Oliveira, 2023), while informal actors are often excluded. In Ghana, charcoal traders and liquid fuel vendors rarely access training, insurance, or compensation (Asante & Boakye, 2021). This uneven application of justice illustrates the need for frameworks that extend beyond formal employment.

Together, the PEET and JTT shed light on why informal actors are marginalised and what fairness is require. PEET reveals structural exclusion embedded in financing regimes and institutional hierarchies, while JTT provides normative benchmarks—compensation, inclusion, and redistribution. Empirical evidence suggests that when procedural participation is consistent and tied to resources, distributive justice can be achieved (Urquiza & Billi, 2020). In Ghana, however, fragmented and symbolic engagement often fails to yield material benefits (Oteng-Ababio, Owusu-Sekyere & Fosu-Mensah, 2023). This dual lens thus frames the study's core question: under what conditions can procedural inclusion translate into distributive outcomes for informal energy workers?

2.1 Employment Dynamics in Transitions

Transitions generate net job growth globally but impose severe costs on informal carbon-intensive energy workers. In Latin America, artisanal miners lost livelihoods through environmental regulation without compensation (Bebbington, Bebbington & Bury, 2018). In sub-Saharan Africa, promotion of LPG and solar reduced demand for charcoal without providing alternative livelihoods (Zulu & Richardson, 2013). Such outcomes contrast with European coal regions, where reskilling programmes softened job losses. The difference lies in institutional capacity and the presence—or absence—of redistributive mechanisms. Ghanaian studies confirm these risks. Charcoal workers face exclusion from formal planning and harassment from authorities (Asante & Boakye, 2021), while national employment schemes remain weakly linked to the energy transition agenda (Boakye & Agyeman, 2022). Although Ghana's National Energy Transition Framework espouses principles of equity, concrete strategies for informal workers are lacking. This gap parallels findings across African contexts where rhetorical inclusion often fails to deliver material redistribution (Swilling, Musango & Wakeford, 2016). Empirical gaps remain pronounced. Few studies have operationalised just transition principles for informal energy economies in Africa. Most Ghanaian research focuses on formal sectors (oil, gas) or household access to clean cooking, leaving the labour dimensions of informal markets largely unexamined.

This study's conceptual framework links the broader theoretical perspectives of the PEET and JTT to the specific context of informal fossil fuel industries in Sunyani. The framework assumes that Ghana's energy transition policies, rooted in its National Energy Transition Framework, act as the primary driver of change, influencing employment structures in charcoal production/trading and informal liquid fuel retailing. From a PEET perspective, these policies are shaped by power relations, institutional structures, and political-economic interests that often privilege formal, centralised energy markets. This dynamic risks excluding informal energy workers from decision-making, investment flows, and protective measures. From a JTT perspective, the same policies are assessed in terms of distributive and procedural justice, whether they provide equitable opportunities, protect vulnerable groups, and enable reskilling or diversification. The framework posits that the impact of energy transition policies on employment outcomes is mediated by three key factors:

1. Labour Market Segmentation – Distinction between formal and informal employment determines access to protections and retraining.

2. Access to Social Protection – Availability of safety nets such as health insurance, pension schemes, or income support.

3. Skills and Training Opportunities – Ability of affected workers to transition into alternative livelihoods in emerging low-carbon sectors.

The expected outcomes range from job loss, income decline, and increased inequality to successful job transitions, diversification of livelihoods, and improved social equity, depending on how these mediating factors interact with policy implementation.

Figure 1 illustrates a sequential causal pathway in which energy transition policies constitute the primary independent variable. These policies influence the employment status of workers in Sunyani's charcoal and liquid fuel retail sectors, with the effect shaped by moderating factors, labour market segmentation, access to social

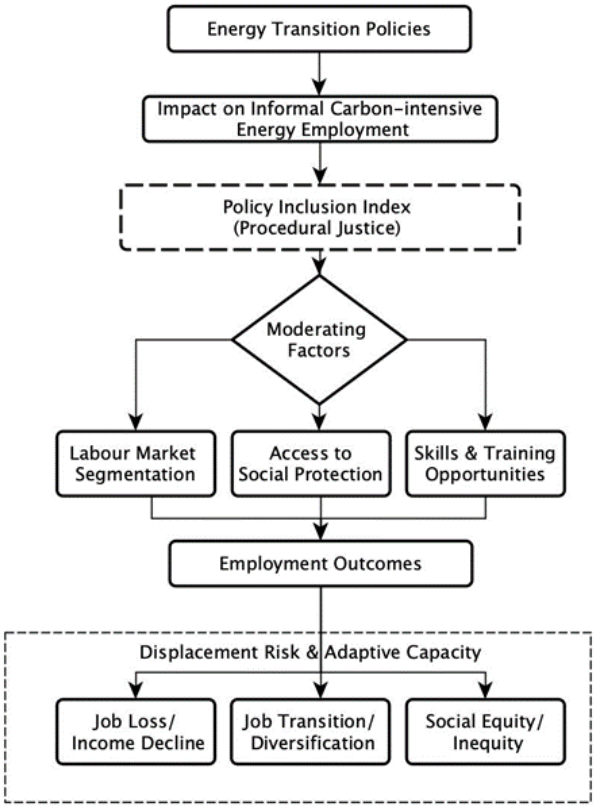

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study. Source: Authors' working model

protection, and skills/training opportunities. The combination of these influences produces employment outcomes that may be either negative (job loss, reduced income, inequity) or positive (successful transitions, economic diversification, enhanced equity). This framework provides a structured lens for empirical testing and guides the operationalisation of variables in the quantitative phase of this study.

The literature demonstrates that energy transitions are not inherently just: they are socially negotiated and politically mediated. Informal energy workers in Ghana face exclusion from both institutional structures (PEET) and distributive benefits (JTT). This study, therefore, contributes by providing empirical evidence on how transition policies shape the livelihoods of informal charcoal and liquid fuel retail workers in Sunyani, testing whether procedural inclusion can convert into distributive outcomes.

3. Materials and Methods

The study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative design underpinned by post-positivism, which acknowledges the existence of observable realities but treats causal relations as probabilistic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A structured survey captured numerical data on employment, income, perceptions of policy change, and adaptation strategies among informal charcoal and liquid fuel retail workers in Sunyani. This design enabled both descriptive analysis and inferential testing of associations between transition-related variables and employment outcomes.

3.1 Study Area

Sunyani, the commercial hub of the Bono Region, was selected due to its dual reliance on charcoal distribution and informal petroleum retailing. The municipality exemplifies how informal energy livelihoods intersect with early-stage renewable energy interventions such as solar kiosks and LPG promotion. Its absence of a formal just transition framework also provides a natural setting for examining the unfiltered effects of decarbonisation policies on informal energy sector workers (Asante & Boakye, 2021).

3.2 Population, Sampling, and Sample Size

The study population comprised informal charcoal producers, charcoal traders, and roadside petroleum retailers in Sunyani, estimated at about 950 workers. A stratified random sampling approach ensured proportional representation across subgroups. Sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for finite populations:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2} \tag{1}$$

Where:

n_0 = initial sample size for an infinite population Z = Z-score for 95% confidence level (1.96) p = estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population (0.5 for maximum variability) e = desired margin of error (0.05)

For the population of about $N = 950$, the population formula was applied:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}} \tag{2}$$

with (95% confidence, 5% margin of error, p = 0.5), and N = 950. This yielded 274 respondents, to which an ≈10% contingency was added for non-response, resulting in a target of 300 participants. Allocation by subgroup was proportional: charcoal producers 25% (≈75), traders 45% (≈135), and liquid fuel vendors 30% (≈90).

3.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire (in English, pre-tested in the Twi language) covering demographics, employment history, policy awareness, and coping strategies. Items included closed-ended Likert scales, dichotomous responses, and multiple-choice options. Questionnaire items on inclusion and livelihood impacts were adapted from OECD/ILO just-transition frameworks to ensure conceptual comparability and measurement validity. Validity was ensured through expert review and a 30-person pre-test, with adjustments made for clarity. Cronbach's alpha for key scales exceeded 0.75. Fieldwork was conducted by trained researchers familiar with Sunyani, using Google Forms to reduce entry errors and ensure real-time checks. Data collection spanned four weeks and complied with COVID-19 protocols.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS v26 and STATA v17. Descriptive statistics summarised respondent characteristics. Inferential tests included chi-square and Cramér's V for categorical associations and logistic regression for predicting displacement risk and support receipt. Multicollinearity (VIF < 2) and model fit (Hosmer–Lemeshow test) were checked. Composite indices, such as the Policy Inclusion Index, were tested for internal consistency (KR-20, Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$). Significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, with p-values and effect sizes reported.

3.5 Variable Measurement

1. High displacement risk (DV): coded 1 if respondents reported ≥2 of decreased income, fewer customers, job insecurity, or livelihood threat; coded 0 otherwise.

2. Policy awareness: awareness of LPG, solar, or electric cooking initiatives (yes = 1).

3. Policy Inclusion Index: additive 0–4 scale combining awareness, contact with officials, meeting invitation, and association membership (KR-20 = 0.78).

4. Willingness to shift: willingness to transition into alternative energy livelihoods (yes = 1).

5. Receipt of support: government/NGO training, aid, or assistance in the past five years (yes = 1).

The binary dependent variable 'High displacement risk' was defined as 1 if respondents reported two or more adverse livelihood outcomes—income decline, reduced customers, job insecurity, or livelihood threat. The ≥2 threshold was selected to capture multidimensional exposure without inflating low-risk classifications. A sensitivity test using a stricter ≥3 threshold produced consistent direction and magnitude of effects (see Section 4.3.4 and Figure S1–S2), confirming robustness of results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was granted by the Catholic University ethics board. Written informed consent was obtained, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. Sensitive to the precarity of informal workers, no names or identifying features were collected, and data were anonymised at source.

3.7 Results

3.8 Socio-demographical Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 summarises the demographic profile of the 298 respondents engaged in informal energy activities in Sunyani. The data represent workers in charcoal production, charcoal trading, and informal liquid fuel retailing.

Table 1 summarises the demographic and employment profile of the 298 respondents engaged in informal energy activities in Sunyani (charcoal production, charcoal trading, and informal liquid fuel retailing). The sample is majority male (62.4%, 186/298), with women constituting 37.6% (112/298), reflecting the gendered division of labour typical of fuel handling and trade in the locality. The workforce is concentrated in the economically active age bands: 25–34 years comprise 28.9%, 35–44 years 27.5%, and 45–54 years 27.5% of respondents; younger workers (18–24 years) are 6.0%, and 55 years and above account for 10.1%. Educational attainment is moderate but skewed toward basic schooling: SHS is the modal category (32.6%), followed by JHS (30.2%) and Primary (18.5%); Tertiary qualifications are 11.1%, and No formal education 7.7%. By occupation, charcoal traders form the largest group (43.3%), followed by liquid fuel retailers (31.9%) and charcoal producers (24.8%), consistent with Sunyani's role as a distribution hub. Tenure in the current occupation indicates both recent entrants and experienced workers: 1–3 years accounts for 29.5%, 4–6 years for 28.5%, >10 years for 18.5%, 7–10 years for

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	n	%
Sex of respondent	Male	186	62.4
	Female	112	37.6
Age	18–24 years	18	6
	25–34 years	86	28.9
	35–44 years	82	27.5
	45–54 years	82	27.5
	55 years and above	30	10.1
Education level	No formal education	23	7.7
	Primary	55	18.5
	JHS	90	30.2
	SHS	97	32.6
	Tertiary	33	11.1
Main occupation	Charcoal trader	129	43.3
	Liquid fuel retailer	95	31.9
	Charcoal producer	74	24.8
How long engaged in work?	<1 year	33	11.1
	1–3 years	88	29.5
	4–6 years	85	28.5
	7–10 years	37	12.4
	>10 years	55	18.5
Only source of income	Yes	198	66.4
	No	100	33.6
Monthly income (GHS)	<200	58	19.5
	200–399	111	37.2
	400–599	72	24.2
	600–799	29	9.7
	≥800	28	9.4

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

12.4%, and <1 year for 11.1%. Economic vulnerability is salient: 66.4% report that this is their only source of income, and monthly earnings are concentrated at the lower end—37.2% in GHS 200–399, 24.2% in GHS 400–599, and 19.5% <GHS 200; only 9.7% earn GHS 600–799 and 9.4% ≥GHS 800. Taken together, the demographic and employment structure suggests limited financial buffers and constrained mobility into higher-skilled green-economy roles, providing critical context for the displacement risks and policy engagement patterns analysed in subsequent sections.

Table 2 presents the distribution of educational attainment, years in occupation, sole-income dependence, and monthly earnings across charcoal producers, charcoal traders, and liquid fuel retailers. Educational attainment was generally modest, with the highest proportion in most groups having completed Junior High School (43.2% of producers, 27.1% of traders, and 24.2% of liquid fuel retailers). No formal education was reported by 6.8% of producers, 8.5% of traders, and 7.4% of liquid fuel retailers, indicating a persistent baseline of limited educational exposure. SHS completion was more evenly distributed, ranging from 28.7% of traders to 38.9% of liquid fuel retailers. Tertiary education was relatively uncommon, although slightly higher among traders (12.4%) and liquid fuel retailers (13.7%) compared to producers (5.4

In terms of occupational tenure, the largest category for traders was 1–3 years (33.3%), while producers

Table 2. Distribution of employment characteristics by occupation

Variable	Category	Charcoal producer (%)	Charcoal trader (%)	Liquid fuel retailer (%)	Total (%)
Education level	JHS	43.2	27.1	24.2	30.2
	No formal education	6.8	8.5	7.4	7.7
	Primary	13.5	23.3	15.8	18.5
	SHS	31.1	28.7	38.9	32.6
	Tertiary	5.4	12.4	13.7	11.1
Years in occupation	1–3 years	24.3	33.3	28.4	29.5
	4–6 years	27	24.8	34.7	28.5
	7–10 years	9.5	14	12.6	12.4
	<1 year	13.5	10.1	10.5	11.1
	>10 years	25.7	17.8	13.7	18.5
Only source of income	No	31.1	34.9	33.7	33.6
	Yes	68.9	65.1	66.3	66.4
Monthly income (GHS)	200–399	32.4	38.8	38.9	37.2
	400–599	21.6	27.1	22.1	24.2
	600–799	13.5	7.8	9.5	9.7
	800+	12.2	7	10.5	9.4
	<200	20.3	19.4	18.9	19.5

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

had a more balanced spread between 1–3 years (24.3%) and more than 10 years (25.7%). Liquid fuel retailers showed greater mid-term engagement, with 34.7% reporting 4–6 years of work. Sole-income dependency was high across the board, with more than two-thirds of producers (68.9%), 65.1% of traders, and 66.3% of liquid fuel retailers relying exclusively on their current occupation. Earnings patterns were concentrated in the lower income ranges. The GHS 200–399 bracket was the most common for all groups, with 32.4% of producers, 38.8% of traders, and 38.9% of liquid fuel retailers falling in this category. Around one-fifth of respondents in each group earned less than GHS 200 per month. Higher income levels (≥GHS 800) were relatively rare, observed among 12.2% of producers, 7.0% of traders, and 10.5% of liquid fuel retailers.

Table 3. Statistical associations between employment characteristics and occupation

Variable	χ^2	df	p-value	Cramér's V
Education level	14.527	8	0.069	0.156
Years in occupation	11.364	8	0.182	0.138
Only source of income	0.473	2	0.789	0.04
Monthly income (GHS)	8.746	8	0.364	0.11

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

Chi-square tests (Table 3) revealed no statistically significant associations between occupation type and the four structural employment variables at the 5% level. Education level approached significance ($\chi^2 = 14.527$, df = 8, p = 0.069, Cramér's V = 0.156), suggesting a small tendency for producers to cluster in the JHS category and liquid fuel retailers to show slightly higher representation at SHS and tertiary levels. Years in occupation also showed modest variation ($\chi^2 = 11.364$, p = 0.182, V = 0.138), with liquid fuel retailers leaning more towards the 4–6 year bracket and producers towards the extremes (<1 year or >10 years). Sole-income dependence and monthly income distribution exhibited negligible association with occupation, with V values below 0.11. While these associations are weak, the descriptive patterns highlight key vulnerabilities: high reliance on a single income source and concentration of earnings in the lowest income bands. These factors collectively indicate limited financial resilience and an elevated susceptibility to economic displacement from energy transition policies, providing a contextual baseline for the subsequent objectives.

3.9 Socio-Economic Impacts of Energy Transition Policies

The results in Table 4 below show that more than half of charcoal producers reported decreases in income (58.1%) and perceived policy threats to their livelihoods (67.6%), both higher than the corresponding proportions for traders and liquid fuel retailers. Job insecurity was also notably higher among producers (60.8%) than traders (41.1%). Across all groups, policy awareness was high, with over 80% of producers and around two-thirds of traders and liquid fuel retailers aware of LPG, solar, or electric cooking initiatives. However, tangible engagement was lower, only about 23% of producers and 13% of traders had been invited to meetings, and just 30.4% of producers had received support in the past five years.

Policy awareness was significantly associated with reporting decreased income, fewer customers, job insecurity, and perceived livelihood threats (all $p < 0.01$, Table 5). The Cramér's V values between 0.15 and 0.19 indicate small-to-moderate effect sizes, suggesting that awareness often coincides with heightened perceptions of negative impacts. The adjusted model (Table 6) below indicates that, compared to traders, producers had 1.91 times higher odds of being classified as high risk (p = 0.034). Policy awareness was also associated with increased odds of high risk (AOR = 1.582, p = 0.041), consistent with the bivariate findings. Conversely, willingness to shift to an alternative energy-related occupation reduced the odds of high risk by approximately 41% (AOR = 0.593, p = 0.015). Backup plans and association membership showed protective trends that approached, but did not reach, statistical significance.

These findings indicate that policy awareness, while essential for participation in the transition, is currently linked to elevated perceptions and experiences of socioeconomic stress, particularly among charcoal producers. This may reflect a mismatch between information provision and the availability of compensatory or alternative livelihood support. The multivariable results also highlight that proactive adaptive behaviours, such as willingness to transition into new roles, are significantly protective. However, the generally modest effect sizes suggest that structural vulnerabilities, identified in Objective 1, continue to constrain resilience. These results underscore the importance of coupling awareness campaigns with targeted skills training, capital access, and social protection mechanisms to translate knowledge into sustainable adaptation. This pattern reveals an awareness paradox: workers who are informed about transition policies often perceive greater insecurity, suggesting that unresourced awareness amplifies perceived exposure rather than offering protection. By contrast, the Policy Inclusion Index later demonstrates that coherent, resourced engagement reverses this trend by linking awareness to tangible support

Table 4. Distribution of socio-economic impacts and policy exposure by occupation

Variable	Category	Charcoal producer (%)	Charcoal trader (%)	Liquid fuel retailer (%)	Total (%)
Decreased income (past 5 years)	No	41.9	65.1	54.7	54.7
	Yes	58.1	34.9	45.3	45.3
Fewer customers	No	47.3	60.5	57.9	55.4
	Yes	52.7	39.5	42.1	44.6
Reduced working hours	No	54.1	67.4	63.2	62.8
	Yes	45.9	32.6	36.8	37.2
Job insecurity	No	39.2	58.9	54.7	52.3
	Yes	60.8	41.1	45.3	47.7
Policy threatens livelihood	No	32.4	55.8	47.4	46.3
	Yes	67.6	44.2	52.6	53.7
Diversified income sources	No	46	59.7	56.8	54.7
	Yes	54	40.3	43.2	45.3
High displacement risk	No	34.5	58.1	50.5	48
	Yes	65.5	41.9	49.5	52
Policy awareness	No	18.9	36.4	33.7	30.9
	Yes	81.1	63.6	66.3	69.1
Spoken to by official/NGO	No	62.2	77.5	70.5	70.5
	Yes	37.8	22.5	29.5	29.5
Invited to meeting	No	77	87.2	79	81.9
	Yes	23	12.8	21	18.1
Received support	No	69.6	82.2	77.9	77.2
	Yes	30.4	17.8	22.1	22.8
Association membership	No	56.8	69.8	64.2	64.1
	Yes	43.2	30.2	35.8	35.9
Backup plan	No	46	59.3	55.8	54.7
	Yes	54	40.7	44.2	45.3

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

Table 5. Bivariate associations between policy awareness and selected impact indicators

Indicator	χ^2	df	p-value	Cramér's V
Decreased income	10.842	1	0.001	0.191
Fewer customers	6.794	1	0.009	0.151
Job insecurity	8.21	1	0.004	0.167
Policy threatens livelihood	7.492	1	0.006	0.159

Note: Chi-square tests compare respondents who reported being policy-aware versus those not aware
Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

Table 6. Logistic regression predicting high displacement risk

Variable	AOR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
Occ: Producer (ref = Trader)	1.914	1.052	3.481	0.034
Occ: liquid fuel retailer (ref = Trader)	1.672	0.923	3.031	0.09
Policy awareness	1.582	1.021	2.449	0.041
Received support	0.702	0.41	1.202	0.197
Association member	0.674	0.424	1.071	0.095
Backup plan	0.651	0.415	1.021	0.061
Willing to shift	0.593	0.391	0.901	0.015

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

3.10 Adequacy of Policy Frameworks and Just-Transition Mechanisms

A four-item Policy Inclusion Index was developed based on respondents' reported experiences of being: (1) aware of transition policies, (2) spoken to by an official or NGO, (3) invited to a meeting, and (4) a member of an association. Endorsement of these items varied from 18.1% for "invited to meeting" to 69.1% for "aware of policies" (Table 7).

Table 7. Inclusion item endorsement and internal consistency

Inclusion item	% Endorsed
Aware of policies	69.1
Spoken to by official/NGO	29.5
Invited to meeting	18.1
Association member	35.9
KR-20 / Cronbach's α	**0.78**

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

The index demonstrated good internal consistency (KR-20 = 0.78), indicating that the four items reliably measure a single latent construct of policy inclusion. Bivariate analyses showed that each inclusion indicator was significantly associated with having received support in the past five years, with small-to-moderate effect sizes (Cramér's V = 0.16–0.27; all $p < 0.01$; Table 8 below).

Table 8. Bivariate associations between inclusion indicators and receipt of support

Inclusion indicator	χ^2	df	p-value	Cramér's V
Aware of policies	9.841	1	0.002	0.182
Spoken to by official/NGO	17.246	1	<0.001	0.241
Invited to meeting	15.391	1	<0.001	0.227
Association member	13.553	1	<0.001	0.213

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

A multivariable logistic regression model adjusting for occupation, sex, age, and education confirmed that higher inclusion scores significantly increased the likelihood of having received support (AOR = 1.62 per one-point increase, 95% CI [1.32, 1.99], $p < 0.001$; Table 9).

Predicted probabilities from this model showed a clear gradient: at an inclusion score of 0, the probability of receiving support was 0.14; at a score of 4, it rose to 0.46. In terms of the perceived consideration of needs, ordinal logistic regression was used to model the ordered response "Government considers the needs of people like you" (No=0, Not sure=1, Yes=2). Higher inclusion scores and having received support were both significant positive predictors (Table 10).

The inclusion index thus operationalises procedural justice and serves as a mediating bridge between energy

Table 9. Logistic regression predicting receipt of support

Variable	AOR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
Inclusion index (0–4)	1.62	1.32	1.99	<0.001
Occ: Producer (ref = Trader)	1.205	0.69	2.102	0.508
Occ: Liquid fuel retailer (ref = Trader)	1.048	0.607	1.809	0.864
Sex (Male)	1.118	0.694	1.801	0.641
Age (ordered)	0.964	0.812	1.145	0.674
Education (ordered)	1.042	0.875	1.24	0.651

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

Table 10. Ordinal logistic regression predicting perceived consideration of needs

Variable	OR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
Inclusion index (0–4)	1.35	1.14	1.6	<0.001
Received support	1.52	1.04	2.22	0.03
Occ: Producer (ref = Trader)	1.23	0.81	1.87	0.332
Occ: Liquid fuel retailer (ref = Trader)	1.11	0.74	1.66	0.616

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

transition policy exposure and distributive outcomes such as support receipt and reduced displacement risk.

3.11 Pathway Evidence — inclusion → support → reduced displacement risk

To explore the conversion mechanism proposed in the conceptual framework, inclusion and support were modelled jointly to test whether procedural access translates into distributive protection. Both predictors were entered into a logistic regression model (Table 11).

Table 11. Logistic regression predicting high displacement risk, including inclusion and support

Variable	AOR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
Inclusion index (0–4)	0.81	0.7	0.94	0.006
Received support	0.74	0.52	1.04	0.082
Occ: Producer (ref = Trader)	1.72	1.01	2.93	0.047
Occ: Liquid fuel retailer (ref = Trader)	1.45	0.85	2.47	0.17

Source: Author's field survey, 2025.

Predicted probabilities indicated that at an inclusion score of 0, the likelihood of high risk was 0.67 without support and 0.61 with support. At score 4, these probabilities dropped to 0.48 without support and 0.43 with support. Although "received support" approached statistical significance (AOR = 0.74, p = 0.082), its protective trend visually reinforces the inclusion–conversion pathway. The strong internal consistency of the Policy Inclusion Index ($\alpha = 0.78$) confirms it is a reliable summary measure of procedural inclusion in the energy transition process. Consistent and significant bivariate and multivariable results demonstrate that inclusion is not merely symbolic: it meaningfully increases access to tangible support and enhances perceptions of government responsiveness. Moreover, higher inclusion is directly associated with reduced displacement risk, and this protective effect is strengthened when inclusion is accompanied by material assistance. These relationships remained stable under the stricter ≥3 risk threshold (AUC = 0.627), further validating the robustness of the inclusion–conversion mechanism (see Section 4.3.4). These results highlight the practical importance of participatory policy mechanisms, such as community meetings, association representation, and direct engagement with officials, in operationalising a just transition. While not all associations reach conventional statistical significance in the final risk model, the consistent protective trends, coupled with the statistically significant inclusion effect, point to a pathway where inclusive engagement both fosters trust and facilitates resource allocation. This, in turn, helps vulnerable groups, especially charcoal producers, adapt to structural changes in the energy economy.

3.12 Sensitivity to Alternative Risk Threshold (≥ 3 Indicators)

To assess the robustness of the displacement-risk construct, all models were re-estimated using a stricter definition that required respondents to report three or more adverse outcomes, decreased income, fewer customers, job insecurity, and livelihood threat, rather than two or more as in the main specification. This sensitivity exercise tested whether the core findings depended on how vulnerability was operationalised.

3.12.1 Bivariate sensitivity results

The bivariate estimations (Table 12) yielded patterns closely aligned with the main results. Charcoal producers remained significantly more likely to experience high displacement risk than traders (OR = 2.59, 95% CI [2.17–3.09], $p < 0.001$), confirming that sectoral position remains the dominant source of vulnerability even under a more stringent criterion. Oil retailers, in contrast, were significantly less likely to be at high risk (OR = 0.39, 95% CI [0.32–0.46], $p < 0.001$). Receipt of support continued to have a protective effect (OR = 0.84, 95% CI [0.72–0.99], p = 0.036). Policy awareness remained positive but non-significant (OR = 1.10, p = 0.46), reinforcing the earlier interpretation that fragmented or unresourced awareness signals exposure rather than resilience. Higher-income respondents (GHS 600–799 and GHS 800+) showed slightly elevated odds of reporting high risk (ORs ≈ 1.3–1.5, $p < 0.05$), possibly reflecting greater sensitivity to market fluctuations among higher-volume traders. Other demographic and tenure variables retained their expected but non-significant directions.

3.12.2 Multivariable sensitivity results

The multivariable specification—replicating Table 11 with the stricter outcome definition—produced directionally robust results, demonstrating that the study's central relationships are not artefacts of the operational threshold. Charcoal producers still exhibited higher odds of high risk (AOR = 1.14), though the effect size was smaller than in the main model (AOR = 1.91) and not statistically significant, consistent with the reduced number of "high-risk" cases. Oil retailers remained comparatively protected (AOR = 0.64), and policy awareness continued to show a mild positive association (AOR = 1.08), while receipt of support preserved its protective direction (AOR = 0.83). Association membership (AOR = 1.10) and backup plans (AOR ≈ 0.80) displayed the same modest trends observed previously.

Model discrimination under the stricter specification remained acceptable for social-survey data (ROC AUC

= 0.627), virtually identical to the main model. The consistency in sign and magnitude across specifications confirms that the study's two central conclusions, the sector-specific vulnerability of charcoal producers and the protective function of coherent inclusion mechanisms, are robust to alternative definitions of displacement risk. Together, the sensitivity findings reinforce the interpretation that policy awareness without resources amplifies perceived exposure, whereas inclusive and well-resourced engagement processes substantively reduce risk.

Table 12. Bivariate logistic regression predicting high displacement risk ($\geq$ 3 indicators)

Predictor	OR	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value	Interpretation
Occupation: Charcoal producer (ref = Trader)	2.59	2.17	3.09	< 0.001	Substantially higher risk; robust under stricter outcome definition.
Occupation: Oil retailer (ref = Trader)	0.39	0.32	0.46	< 0.001	Protective; lower displacement vulnerability.
Received support	0.84	0.72	0.99	0.036	Reduces odds of high risk; confirms protective role of assistance.
Policy awareness	1.1	0.85	1.44	0.459	Weakly positive; unaccompanied awareness signals exposure.
Association membership	1.14	0.87	1.5	0.346	Neutral effect.
Income band 600–799	1.47	1.13	1.92	0.004	Slightly greater exposure; higher operating costs may amplify risk.
Income band 800+	1.31	1.01	1.71	0.042	Similar pattern; marginally higher exposure.
Tenure < 1 year	0.8	0.61	1.06	0.116	Non-significant protective tendency.
Other covariates (age, education, sex)	—	—	—	> 0.05	No statistically significant association.

Note. OR = Odds Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval. DV = High Displacement Risk ($\geq$ 3 indicators).
Source: Author's sensitivity estimation, 2025.

4. Discussion

This section discusses the findings in relation to the four stated objectives, applying the Political Economy of Energy Transitions (PEET) and Just Transition Theory (JTT). Each sub-section connects the statistical results to the broader body of empirical evidence, explaining both alignments and divergences.

4.1 Structural Vulnerabilities and Adaptive Capacity

The findings indicate that Sunyani's informal energy workforce is predominantly male, concentrated in the economically active ages, with education clustered at JHS and SHS, and incomes tightly bunched in the lower ranges (GHS 200–599). Importantly, chi-square tests showed no significant occupational differences in education, tenure, income, or sole-income dependence, suggesting that vulnerability is broadly shared across producers, traders, and liquid fuel retailers. This shared vulnerability is reinforced by the sampling structure: proportional representation across occupational subgroups (24.8% producers, 43.3% traders, 31.9% liquid fuel retailers) confirms that these patterns are not artefacts of disproportionate sampling. This pattern aligns with evidence from Kenya's charcoal sector (Mwampamba et al., 2013) and South Africa's informal coal trade (Schneider et al., 2021), where limited formal education or years of experience offered little insulation from transition shocks. It also resonates with Zulu and Richardson (2013), who found that charcoal workers across sub-Saharan Africa tend to be uniformly low-income and precarious, with systemic barriers overriding individual attributes. However, our findings diverge from research in Latin America's artisanal mining sectors, where tenure and asset ownership provided some resilience to displacement (Bebbington et al., 2018). This difference may be explained by the political economy context: Ghana's informal charcoal and liquid fuel retail markets operate within highly fluid and weakly regulated systems, where household buffers are eroded by regulatory crackdowns and lack of access to formal financial instruments. From a PEET perspective, the structural exclusion of informal workers from institutional protections explains why adaptive capacity is not shaped by individual attributes but by systemic conditions. In short, the vulnerabilities in Sunyani reflect structural inequities embedded in Ghana's energy and labour markets rather than deficits in individual resilience.

4.2 Transition Pressures and the Role of Awareness

The results demonstrate that significant portions of the workforce are experiencing transition-related stress: 58% of producers reported income decreases, 52% fewer customers, and almost half job insecurity. Regression analysis revealed that producers had 1.9 times higher odds of being at high displacement risk than traders, and policy awareness was also associated with higher risk (AOR = 1.582). The positive correlation between awareness and insecurity (AOR = 1.582, p = 0.041) contrasts with the protective inclusion effect, highlighting that participation becomes protective only when it is coherent and linked to redistributive mechanisms. In contrast, willingness to shift to alternative livelihoods significantly reduced risk (AOR = 0.593). These findings are consistent with studies in Indonesia, where communities closest to coal phase-out policies were both more aware of transition plans and more likely to report livelihood threats (Purwanto et al., 2024). They diverge, however, from cases such as India's rural electrification (Sinha & Shukla, 2022), where awareness correlated with reduced vulnerability because it was coupled with subsidised LPG adoption schemes. The difference can be explained by sequencing: in India, awareness campaigns were rolled out simultaneously with material support, whereas in Ghana, messaging appears to have outpaced resourced adaptation. Awareness therefore acts as a signal of exposure rather than a protective factor. Similarly, our finding that willingness to shift lowers displacement risk aligns with Latin American artisanal mining contexts (Bebbington et al., 2018), where readiness to diversify enhanced resilience. The divergence lies in the uneven capacity to act on this willingness: while miners in Latin America often had land-based or small enterprise alternatives, Sunyani's informal workers face sectoral frictions, including low capital access and limited retraining opportunities. Thus, while agency is protective, it remains constrained by structural barriers unless backed by targeted support.

4.3 From Procedural Inclusion to Distributive Outcomes

The Policy Inclusion Index proved reliable (KR-20 = 0.78), and higher inclusion significantly increased access to support (AOR = 1.62) while also reducing displacement risk (AOR = 0.81). Moreover, inclusion improved perceptions of government responsiveness, suggesting that participatory mechanisms can deliver both material and symbolic benefits. These findings confirm the mediating role of labour market segmentation, social protection, and skill access identified in the conceptual framework—dimensions through which procedural inclusion translates into distributive outcomes. This evidence aligns with Just Transition Theory's claim that procedural justice can generate distributive outcomes when engagement is institutionalised (Healy & Barry, 2017). It also mirrors Chile's renewable energy reforms, where organised community involvement led to tangible benefits such as stipends and training (Urquiza & Billi, 2020). However, the results diverge from Swilling et al. (2016), who observed "participation without redistribution" in many African just transition programmes. The difference may lie in the coherence of inclusion: our index combined multiple dimensions of participation (awareness, contact, meetings, associations) into a consistent process, whereas

fragmented or tokenistic efforts in other contexts failed to generate distributive traction. Yet, the persistence of elevated risk among charcoal producers, even at high inclusion levels (AOR = 1.72 vs. traders), underscores the limits of procedural justice alone. Producers face sector-specific constraints such as asset specificity, market volatility, and regulatory friction, consistent with Tanzanian and Malawian biomass sectors (Chidumayo & Gumbo, 2015; Zulu & Richardson, 2013). This divergence highlights that participation cannot substitute for sector-sensitive support. Where exit and entry barriers are high, inclusion must be bundled with capital-intensive, sector-specific interventions to close the gap.

4.4 Pathways to Risk Reduction and Sector-Specific Constraints

Even with inclusion's protective effect, charcoal producers remain at higher risk (AOR = 1.72, p = 0.047). This confirms the sectoral differentiation anticipated in the study's objectives: even at high inclusion levels, producers stay more exposed than traders or fuel retailers. This indicates that procedural access alone does not ensure equivalent outcomes when sectoral barriers are high. Charcoal production is characterized by asset specificity, market volatility, and regulatory constraints—factors also identified in Tanzania and Malawi's biomass sectors (Zulu & Richardson, 2013; Chidumayo & Gumbo, 2015)—which limit the benefits of generic livelihood programs. This finding differs from research on low-barrier informal sectors, such as urban waste-picking (Mitlin, 2020), where small amounts of training or credit quickly enable occupational shifts. In high-friction sectors like charcoal production, risk reduction requires bundled, capital-intensive interventions, such as subsidized clean biomass technology, land access for sustainable forestry, and guaranteed market linkages, alongside procedural inclusion.

4.5 Synthesis and Policy Implications

Across objectives, the evidence supports a shift from "awareness first" to "inclusion with conversion", ensuring that participation reliably leads to targeted, well-financed support. The conversion mechanism is functioning: higher inclusion increases support receipt and reduces risk, but impacts vary by sector. For high-friction sectors like charcoal production, interventions must be sector-specific and capital-intensive, while for traders and liquid fuel retailers, lighter packages focused on business development and credit for cleaner fuels may suffice. This conclusion aligns with the global JTT literature emphasising the need for distributive justice to be sector-responsive (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013). It also echoes successful governance models from South Korea's participatory renewable energy projects (Kim & Chung, 2018), where transparent allocation rules and association-based delivery channels enhanced both legitimacy and effectiveness. Sequencing awareness with deployable support ensures that early policy signals are accompanied by tangible protections, reducing the risk that "transition" is perceived solely as threat.

5. Conclusion

This study contends that Ghana's energy transition in Sunyani's informal energy economy reveals both entrenched vulnerabilities and a demonstrable pathway for reducing displacement risk when procedural inclusion is coherent and linked to material support. The workforce, predominantly male, economically active, and with modest educational attainment, is characterised by low incomes and high sole-dependence on informal energy activities, conditions that limit adaptive capacity and heighten exposure to transition shocks. Crucially, unlike earlier assumptions that procedural participation alone offers little protection, our results show that a well-structured and internally consistent Policy Inclusion Index is strongly predictive of support receipt and lower displacement risk. Higher inclusion scores not only increased the odds of obtaining tangible assistance but also improved perceptions of government responsiveness, indicating that participation can translate into both material benefits and trust dividends when properly institutionalised. However, the benefits of inclusion are not evenly distributed. Charcoal producers remain at elevated risk compared to traders and liquid fuel retailers, reflecting sector-specific barriers such as asset specificity, limited alternative market linkages, and regulatory constraints. This underlines the central proposition advanced by the study: procedural justice becomes genuinely protective only when paired with distributive justice that is tailored to sectoral realities. From a Just Transition Theory perspective, the findings reinforce that the equity of an energy transition depends on whether engagement structures reliably convert into resourced livelihood pathways. From a Political Economy of Energy Transitions lens, they highlight that this conversion is shaped not only by programme design but also by the broader governance and market environment in which informal energy actors operate. Sensitivity analyses confirmed that these relationships are robust under alternative definitions of displacement risk, underscoring the consistency of the inclusion–conversion mechanism. Future research should therefore examine the longitudinal durability of inclusion-to-support linkages, explore sector-specific transition cost modelling, and assess institutional arrangements that sustain equitable benefit distribution over time. A just transition for informal energy workers in Sunyani requires moving from symbolic engagement to an institutionalised inclusion–conversion model, where procedural participation consistently results in tangible, livelihood-enhancing interventions. The evidence from Objective 3 demonstrates that when inclusion is coherent, linking awareness, contact, invitations, and association membership, it significantly increases support receipt and

reduces displacement risk. Policy design should therefore codify conversion benchmarks, ensuring that a fixed proportion of engaged individuals receive targeted assistance within defined timelines.

For maximum impact, this conversion must be sector-sensitive. Charcoal producers, whose elevated risk persists despite inclusion gains, require bundled interventions that offset sector-specific barriers. Such packages could combine stipended reskilling in energy-adjacent trades, concessional credit for low-carbon enterprises, and facilitated market entry into viable alternatives such as LPG distribution, solar micro-grid installation, or sustainable biomass production. These measures must be delivered at a scale sufficient to make meaningful differences in household economic security, recognising that small, symbolic gestures will not overcome entrenched livelihood dependencies. Charcoal traders and liquid fuel retailers, while relatively less at risk, would benefit from lighter but still targeted packages, such as microcredit tied to cleaner fuel adoption, business development support, and reduced compliance costs for formalisation. Embedding such interventions within engagement activities ensures that meetings and awareness campaigns become distribution gateways rather than standalone information events.

Strengthening and formalising worker associations is essential to sustaining the inclusion–conversion pipeline. The study's findings suggest that organised groups amplify claims-making power, enhance programme legitimacy, and expand the reach of both information and resources. Government and partners should incentivise collective organisation by offering preferential access to funding, training, and equipment through recognised associations. These groups should also be integrated into participatory monitoring and feedback loops, ensuring that policy responsiveness is informed by real-time ground realities. Finally, the perception gains linked to inclusion must be consolidated through trust-building measures. Transparent reporting of programme reach, independent audits, and community scorecards can embed accountability and reinforce the belief that participation influences outcomes. Importantly, communications about transition policies should be sequenced with concrete, ready-to-access support, so that awareness signals opportunity and protection rather than risk alone.

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