Conversational Pathways to Just Energy Transition in Nigeria: Addressing Knowledge Gaps Through Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

The Nigerian government's recent ban on solar panel importation—ostensibly to boost local manufacturing—reveals the profound disconnection between our climate ambitions and socioeconomic realities. This decision, made without apparent consideration for existing solar businesses or energy access implications, shows the contradictions which threaten to undermine Nigeria's transition to sustainable energy.

Let me be clear: photovoltaic technology, like all sustainable energy solutions, represents both disruption and opportunity. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group projects 340,000 new renewable energy sector jobs created by 2030, if the right policies and investments are made. Meanwhile, these jobs shift workers from fossil fuels, and require additional skills and training for an estimated 30 million employees by 2050. We nod at these statistics at conferences, but they represent real lives—the petroleum engineer in Port Harcourt whose expertise suddenly seems antiquated, the young woman in Abuja whose solar startup now faces insurmountable regulatory barriers, the communities whose economic foundations are shifting beneath their feet. It is easy to think of these numbers as abstract economic indicators but these are real human lives and stories.

Consider the solar companies currently operating through importation channels. Their ultimatum is stark: adapt or disappear. Yet adaptation requires bridges, not barriers. It requires knowledge and demands policy coherence, not contradictory signals that protect theoretical domestic industries while destroying existing ones. It raises the fundamental question: What does a just transition mean for ordinary Nigerians navigating these turbulent changes? According to the International Labour Organization, such a transition must "green the economy in a way that is fair and inclusive to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind." The language is simple, but the concept is radical. This isn't merely the process of swapping diesel generators for solar panels; it requires reimagining the entire socioeconomic contract upon which our nation stands.

The challenges before us are structural. Our approach to energy transition suffers from critical knowledge gaps which threaten to transform what should be an opportunity for greater economic inclusion into another chapter of dispossession and inequality. These gaps manifest in multiple ways:

- First, we lack comprehensive skill-mapping between fossil fuel sectors and renewable energy industries. Without systematic identification of transferable competencies, workforce transitions become haphazard, privileging those with social capital and connections rather than creating pathways for the majority.

- Second, regional disparities in economic resilience remain largely unaddressed. Communities in the Niger Delta, whose economies have been shaped by oil extraction for

generations, face particular vulnerability in the face of an energy transition. Yet our predictive models and intervention strategies for these regions remain woefully inadequate.

- Third, and perhaps most crucially, we have failed to build the knowledge infrastructure necessary for communities to envision alternative futures. How does a society whose generational narrative has been defined by oil extraction begin to reimagine itself? How do we transform not just our power grid, but our sense of possibility?

These knowledge deficits are not just technical; they also have psychological and emotional consequences. When communities cannot see viable economic pathways forward, the result is not simply unemployment but collective uncertainty which manifests as fear, despair, and resistance to change. Fear does not birth innovation. Despair cannot nurture the creativity needed to build a sustainable future. And make no mistake—resistance to change is a structural problem, not an individual weakness.

Bridging the Knowledge Gap: A Methodological Framework

To address these critical knowledge deficits, I propose a research intervention that goes beyond conventional academic approaches. This intervention would employ a system which analyzes both the knowledge deficits and the efficacy of conversations across three essential dimensions. The primary conversational intervention—a podcast structured in the form of a focus group—would serve as both a research mechanism and a knowledge-building tool. Unlike traditional media that speaks at communities rather than with them, this format creates space for multilateral exchange between experts, community members, and policymakers.

- The first dimension will address capacity-building for transitioning from carbon-intensive industries to energy-efficient alternatives. Developing structured dialogue platforms can serve to facilitate targeted knowledge transfer across interdisciplinary domains.

- The second dimension will focus on creating open feedback loops between policymakers and communities to incorporate indigenous knowledge. Nigeria's climate policies have typically flowed in one direction: from government ministries to communities. This excludes from policy formation generations of environmental wisdom held within communities themselves. These knowledge systems contain crucial frameworks for conceptualizing human-environment relationships beyond extraction.

- The third dimension will center on fostering psychological safety through inclusive dialogue which affirms citizens' agency in shaping their climate future. Technical

solutions mean little without addressing the emotional landscape of the communities facing these transitions.

Studies suggest that conversational interventions measurably reduce resistance to change while increasing community capacity to envision and articulate alternative futures. The podcast focus group proves particularly effective in democratizing access to information typically confined to academic or policy circles, while simultaneously elevating community voices often excluded from national discourse on energy transition. With this format, each episode becomes a small act of collective reimagining.

From Research to Action

Nigeria stands at a crossroads. Our energy transition can either reinforce existing patterns of inequality or create the foundation for a more just economic order. The difference lies not simply in our technological choices but in our commitment to building infrastructures that enable all Nigerians to participate in shaping our climate future.

Knowledge, in this context, becomes our most critical infrastructure—more important than solar panels or transmission lines. Without shared understanding of transition pathways, without community participation in designing economic futures, and without recognition of the emotional dimensions of industrial change, our green energy ambitions will falter.

We must draw from the lessons of the great naturalist and systems thinker, Gregory Bateson, who understood that transformation takes place not just in grand gestures, but in subtle interactions within complex systems. The path forward will be best charted by our capacity to grab the metaphorical bull by the horn in order to create adaptive and responsive knowledge ecosystems.