

Sustainability and Energy Equity: Bridging Gaps for a Just Transition

Hafize Nurgul Durmus Senyapar*^{}, Samet Ayik**^{}, Ramazan Bayindir**^{}†

*Faculty of Health Sciences, Gazi University, 06490 Cankaya/Ankara/Turkey

**Faculty of Technology, Gazi University, 06500 Besevler/Ankara/Turkey

(nurguld@gazi.edu.tr, samet.ayik1@gazi.edu.tr, bayindir@gazi.edu.tr)

†Corresponding Author; Ramazan Bayindir, Gazi University, Ankara, 06500, Turkey,

Tel: +90 312 202 8540, bayindir@gazi.edu.tr

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Abstract- This study investigates the convergence of sustainability and energy equity, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities that shape equitable global energy transitions. Despite advances in renewable energy technologies, systemic inequities persist in access, affordability, and participation, disproportionately impacting marginalized and underserved communities. The research identifies critical barriers, including economic, infrastructural, policy, and social challenges, and evaluates innovative strategies such as community-led initiatives, equity-focused policies, and advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and smart grids. The study proposes collaborative pathways for policymakers, technologists, and communities to co-create inclusive and sustainable energy systems by integrating equity considerations into energy policies and practices. The findings underscore the indivisibility of energy equity and sustainability, advocating for inclusive policymaking, technological innovation, and grassroots empowerment to achieve environmental and social justice. This work contributes to the discourse on designing energy systems that are both environmentally sustainable and socially equitable, providing actionable insights for addressing climate justice and fostering a just energy transition.

Keywords: Energy Equity, Sustainable Energy Transition, Policy Integration, Climate Justice, Inclusive Policymaking, Just Transition.

1. Introduction

Global energy inequities represent one of the most pressing challenges in transitioning to sustainable energy systems. Across the world, millions of people, particularly in developing and underdeveloped regions, lack access to reliable, affordable, and clean energy [1]. These disparities are stark in rural and marginalized communities, where energy poverty exacerbates other forms of socioeconomic inequality. The global energy field is further complicated by historical imbalances in resource distribution, technological access, and political power [2]. These inequities directly impact progress toward sustainability goals, particularly those outlined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 7, which advocates for universal access to affordable and clean energy, is closely intertwined with goals related to poverty eradication, quality education, gender equality, and climate action. Without addressing these energy disparities, the broader objectives of social and environmental sustainability remain unattainable.

Thus, tackling global energy inequities is not just a matter of fairness but a fundamental requirement for achieving a sustainable and equitable future [3], [4]. Energy equity is central to the concept of a just transition, which emphasizes the need for fairness and inclusivity as societies transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy systems. A just transition acknowledges that different communities face unique challenges in the energy transition process. Workers in carbon-intensive industries require retraining and support, while vulnerable populations must be protected from potential economic disruptions caused by new energy policies [5], [6]. Energy equity ensures that the benefits of sustainable energy systems, such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved health outcomes, and economic opportunities, are distributed fairly across all populations. It also addresses the risks of leaving certain groups behind in the transition process, such as low-income households burdened by the costs of new technologies or communities disproportionately affected by climate change [7]. Policies to achieve energy equity prioritize inclusive participation,

affordable access to clean energy, and targeted interventions for marginalized groups. By embedding equity principles into energy planning and implementation, societies can achieve a just transition that aligns with environmental and social justice goals [8]. Sustainable energy systems cannot succeed without a holistic approach that addresses social, economic, and ecological dimensions. Social considerations, such as energy access and equity, are critical for ensuring public support and the long-term viability of sustainable energy initiatives. Economic factors, including job creation, energy affordability, and market stability, are essential in incentivizing the adoption of renewable technologies and ensuring broad-based economic growth [9], [10]. Meanwhile, environmental dimensions, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimizing ecological impacts, drive the transition to sustainable energy systems. However, addressing these dimensions in isolation often leads to unintended consequences. Prioritizing environmental goals without considering social impacts could result in policies that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations while ignoring economic realities could slow the adoption of renewable energy technologies.

This research focuses on the intersection of sustainability principles and energy equity frameworks, addressing the complex challenges and opportunities in integrating these fields. Energy equity, which emphasizes fairness in access to clean and affordable energy, is often overlooked in broader sustainability initiatives. However, achieving sustainability goals without incorporating equity considerations risks perpetuating social and economic inequalities. The research explores the multifaceted role of policy, technology, and community participation in bridging sustainability and energy equity gaps. Policies play a critical role in setting the regulatory and institutional frameworks needed for equitable energy transitions, while technological advancements can enable scalable and inclusive solutions. Community participation, meanwhile, ensures that the voices of marginalized and underserved populations are included in decision-making processes, leading to more just and sustainable outcomes. By addressing these dimensions, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sustainability and equity can be effectively aligned.

This research explores strategies for aligning sustainability efforts with energy equity principles, ensuring that the benefits of sustainable energy systems are distributed fairly and inclusively. This aim reflects the need to balance environmental, economic, and social goals within the context of global energy transitions. The research aims to examine the systemic and structural barriers that prevent the integration of energy equity into sustainability initiatives. These barriers include unequal access to financial resources, technological gaps, policy shortcomings, and socio-political challenges disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. The research evaluates effective strategies for embedding equity considerations into sustainable energy transitions by analyzing existing case studies, policies, and practices. This includes examining innovative policy approaches, community-driven renewable energy projects, and technological advancements that address equity and sustainability goals. The research also aims to propose

practical and actionable pathways for policymakers, energy sector stakeholders, and community leaders. These pathways will emphasize inclusive policy design, equitable financing mechanisms, and participatory governance models to ensure that energy transitions benefit all segments of society.

Despite significant advancements in sustainable energy technologies and policies, profound inequities persist in access, affordability, and participation. While renewable energy systems have the potential to revolutionize energy delivery and mitigate environmental degradation, these benefits are not equitably distributed. Many marginalized communities, particularly in developing regions, remain excluded from affordable and reliable energy sources due to systemic barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of financial resources, and limited representation in decision-making processes. This inequity undermines the broader sustainability goals and perpetuates social and economic disparities. Achieving a just transition to sustainable energy systems requires integrating equity considerations into sustainability frameworks, ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition to cleaner and more efficient energy solutions. Addressing this gap is essential for creating inclusive energy systems that align with global sustainability goals. The research questions of the study are as follows:

R.Q.1: What are the key barriers to integrating sustainability and energy equity? This question seeks to identify the structural, economic, and technological challenges that prevent aligning energy equity with sustainability goals.

R.Q.2: How can sustainability efforts be aligned with energy equity to ensure a just transition? This inquiry explores ways to embed fairness and inclusivity into the design and implementation of sustainable energy initiatives.

R.Q.3: What strategies can policymakers, technologists, and communities adopt to foster energy equity within sustainable frameworks? This question aims to uncover actionable solutions by examining the roles of various stakeholders in driving equitable and sustainable energy transitions.

R.Q.4: How can equitable energy access drive inclusive economic development? This question investigates the role of equitable energy access in stimulating economic growth, reducing income disparities, and fostering local development. It seeks to identify effective strategies, such as community-led renewable energy initiatives and targeted policy interventions, that enable underserved communities to benefit from renewable energy transitions and contribute to broader economic and social equity goals.

This study provides critical insights into the intricate relationship between sustainability and energy equity, contributing to a growing body of knowledge on just energy transitions. The research offers practical solutions for integrating equity considerations into sustainable energy systems by examining barriers, strategies, and stakeholder roles. The findings have significant implications for multiple fields. Policymakers can leverage the insights to design inclusive policies and equitable funding mechanisms. Technologists can explore innovations that prioritize accessibility and affordability. Grassroots organizations and

communities can use the strategies to advocate for participatory governance and local ownership of energy projects. By bridging gaps between sustainability and energy equity, the study supports the development of energy systems that reduce environmental impacts, empower communities, promote social justice, and enhance economic opportunities. This holistic approach ensures that the transition to sustainable energy systems is both just and inclusive, benefiting all segments of society.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research approach to investigate the interplay between sustainability and energy equity. The exploratory nature of the research is well-suited for uncovering gaps, opportunities, and innovative strategies in an area where complex interactions exist between social, economic, and environmental dimensions [11]. The study uses qualitative methods to provide a nuanced understanding of the barriers and solutions for integrating equity into sustainable energy transitions. The research draws on diverse data sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis. A critical review of academic literature related to sustainability and energy equity forms the foundation of the study. Global frameworks such as the United Nations SDGs and reports from the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) are analyzed to contextualize the study within international efforts to promote sustainable development and equitable energy systems. The thematic analysis serves as the primary analytical framework for this study, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and critical insights. This methodology ensures a holistic and evidence-based exploration of the complex relationship between sustainability and energy equity [12]. It highlights the importance of diverse perspectives, robust data sources, and systematic analysis in developing inclusive and sustainable energy transition strategies.

3. Findings

3.1. Barriers to Integrating Sustainability and Energy Equity (Answering RQ1)

One of the most significant barriers to achieving energy equity is the high cost of renewable energy technologies, which limits access for low-income communities. While the cost of renewable energy systems such as solar panels and wind turbines has decreased in recent years, the initial investment remains prohibitive for many households, particularly in developing regions. Additionally, financial mechanisms such as subsidies and incentives often fail to support those in greatest need adequately. This economic disparity perpetuates energy inequities and prevents efforts to make renewable energy accessible to all segments of society [13], [14].

Another critical barrier is the unequal distribution of energy infrastructure, particularly between rural and urban areas. Urban centers typically benefit from modernized energy grids and a wider range of energy options, while rural and remote areas often lack basic access to reliable electricity

[15]. This disparity limits the adoption of renewable energy technologies in underserved regions and exacerbates social and economic inequalities. Without targeted investments in infrastructure development, rural communities remain disconnected from the benefits of sustainable energy systems [16].

Insufficient emphasis on equity in national and global sustainability policies further complicates the integration of energy equity into sustainable development efforts. While many policies focus on environmental and economic dimensions, they often overlook the social justice aspects of energy transitions. Global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and national renewable energy strategies frequently prioritize emission reductions over equitable energy access. This policy gap underscores the need for a more inclusive approach that integrates equity considerations into the design and implementation of sustainability policies [17].

Social and cultural factors also play a significant role in limiting energy equity. Marginalized groups, including women, indigenous communities, and economically disadvantaged populations, are often excluded from energy decision-making processes. This lack of inclusivity perpetuates disparities and undermines efforts to create equitable energy systems. Additionally, cultural norms and biases can impede the adoption of renewable energy technologies, particularly in communities where traditional energy sources are deeply ingrained in daily life [18]. Addressing these social and cultural barriers requires deliberate efforts to foster participation, representation, and inclusivity in energy transitions.

3.2. Aligning Sustainability Efforts with Energy Equity (Answering RQ2)

Equity-first policies represent a paradigm transition in energy planning and implementation. These policies acknowledge that traditional market-driven approaches to energy transition often exclude vulnerable populations and exacerbate existing socioeconomic disparities. Several jurisdictions have successfully implemented programs demonstrating the viability of equity-centered energy policies. For instance, California's Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing program provides solar installations for low-income housing developments while creating job opportunities within disadvantaged communities. Similarly, Scotland's Warm Homes Fund combines energy efficiency improvements with fuel poverty reduction measures, ensuring that sustainability initiatives benefit those most affected by energy insecurity [19], [20].

Community-led renewable energy initiatives have emerged to combine sustainability with social equity. These grassroots projects demonstrate that local ownership and control of energy resources can generate multiple benefits beyond environmental sustainability. The Samsø Island project in Denmark is a compelling example, where community ownership of wind turbines has achieved carbon neutrality, created local jobs, and reduced energy costs for residents. In indigenous communities across North America,

solar and wind projects managed by tribal authorities have provided energy independence while preserving cultural values and traditional land use practices [21], [22], [23].

The role of technology in promoting energy equity has evolved significantly with the advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and smart grid systems. These innovations are revolutionizing the way energy is distributed, monitored, and optimized at the local level. AI-powered demand response systems can help balance grid loads while providing cost savings to consumers, particularly benefiting those most sensitive to energy price fluctuations. Smart meters and grid technologies enable more precise monitoring of energy consumption patterns, allowing for targeted assistance programs and more equitable rate structures [24].

The alignment of national energy policies with the United Nations SDGs provides a framework for ensuring that sustainability efforts contribute to more significant social equity. SDG 7, which calls for affordable and clean energy for all, serves for policy development. However, its interconnections with other SDGs, such as poverty reduction (SDG 1), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and sustainable cities (SDG 11), highlight the need for integrated approaches. Nations leading in this area have developed comprehensive energy strategies that explicitly link sustainability targets with equity metrics, measuring success in terms of carbon reduction and improvements in energy access, affordability, and social inclusion [25].

The advancement of energy equity through sustainable solutions requires sustained commitment from policymakers, community leaders, and technological innovators. Success stories from various contexts demonstrate that energy transitions can be powerful tools for social transformation when equity considerations are prioritized alongside environmental goals. As the global community continues to address climate change, ensuring that sustainable energy solutions are accessible and beneficial to all segments of society remains paramount. This approach advances environmental objectives and creates more just and resilient communities.

3.3. *Strategies for a Just Energy Transition (Answering RQ3)*

Participatory policymaking is essential in achieving equity in sustainable energy transitions. By including underrepresented communities in energy planning and decision-making processes, policymakers can ensure that the needs and priorities of marginalized populations are adequately addressed. Participatory approaches foster inclusivity, transparency, and trust, creating energy systems that reflect the diverse interests of society. Examples include community consultations, stakeholder forums, and collaborative planning initiatives that involve indigenous groups, low-income communities, and other historically excluded populations. This inclusive model empowers communities to shape energy solutions that align with their unique social, cultural, and economic contexts [26].

Targeted subsidies and financial mechanisms are essential for promoting renewable energy adoption in low-income areas. These mechanisms help lower the cost

barriers, often preventing underserved communities from accessing sustainable energy technologies. Programs such as grants, low-interest loans, and tax incentives can make solar panels, wind turbines, and energy-efficient appliances more affordable [27]. Governments and international organizations have successfully implemented subsidy schemes prioritizing rural electrification and supporting small-scale renewable energy projects in economically disadvantaged regions. These strategies help reduce energy inequities while advancing sustainability goals by directing financial resources where they are needed most.

Educational programs and community training initiatives are critical in empowering individuals and communities with the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in energy transitions. Capacity-building efforts can range from technical training on renewable energy installation and maintenance to broader educational campaigns about the benefits of sustainable energy systems. Such programs enhance community resilience, create local employment opportunities, and foster a sense of ownership over energy projects [28]. Initiatives that train women in rural areas to become solar engineers have demonstrated significant social and economic benefits, breaking gender barriers and promoting equity in energy access.

Establishing robust frameworks for monitoring and accountability is vital to ensuring that equity outcomes are achieved in sustainable energy projects. These frameworks involve the development of metrics and indicators to assess the distributional impacts of energy policies and projects. Regular evaluations and reporting mechanisms allow stakeholders to track progress, identify shortcomings, and implement corrective measures [29]. Accountability measures, such as independent audits and community oversight committees, enhance transparency and trust in energy initiatives. By embedding monitoring and accountability into project design and implementation, stakeholders can ensure that sustainability and equity objectives are effectively met.

3.4. *The Economic Impacts of Equitable Energy Access (Answering RQ4)*

Energy plays a pivotal role in economic development by driving industrial productivity, enhancing human capital, and improving living standards. Reliable and affordable energy access underpins economic activities, enabling businesses to expand and creating employment opportunities. Renewable energy, in particular, can stimulate green economic growth through investments in sustainable technologies, job creation in clean energy sectors, and reduced dependency on volatile fossil fuel markets [30].

Energy is a cornerstone of economic development, playing a multifaceted role in fostering industrial growth, improving workforce capabilities, and elevating living standards. Reliable and affordable access to energy is foundational for sustaining economic activities, enabling businesses to operate efficiently, expand their reach, and innovate in competitive markets. This, in turn, drives job

creation, supports entrepreneurial ventures, and enhances the overall resilience of local and national economies.

Renewable energy offers a particularly transformative potential in this landscape. Investments in sustainable technologies address environmental concerns and catalyze green economic growth by reducing reliance on volatile fossil fuel markets and opening new avenues for employment. Clean energy sectors, such as solar, wind, and bioenergy, are labor-intensive during development phases, creating significant job opportunities across various skill levels. Additionally, renewable energy projects often stimulate ancillary industries, such as manufacturing, logistics, and maintenance services, fostering a broader economic ripple effect. The International Energy Agency highlights how investments in clean energy technologies contribute significantly to GDP growth, emphasizing their role as a critical driver of economic progress.

The International Energy Agency provides insights, shown in Fig. 1, into how clean energy investments contribute to economic growth [31].

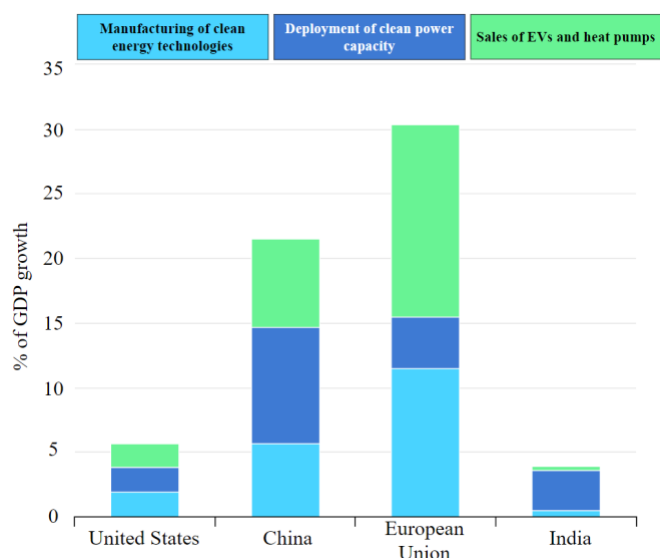


Fig. 1. Contribution of investment and sales in selected clean energy technologies to GDP growth [31]

However, despite these benefits, the distribution of economic advantages remains unequal. Marginalized and

underserved communities often lack access to renewable energy infrastructure, perpetuating cycles of economic stagnation and widening existing disparities. In regions without equitable energy access, businesses face operational challenges, educational and healthcare institutions struggle to deliver services effectively, and individuals are denied opportunities to improve their quality of life. These inequities highlight a pressing need for policies prioritizing equitable energy access as a foundation for inclusive economic development.

Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach. Deliberate policy interventions, such as targeted subsidies, grants, and public-private partnerships, can lower the financial barriers to renewable energy adoption for low-income and rural populations. Investments in infrastructure development, particularly in remote and underdeveloped areas, can ensure that the benefits of clean energy are accessible to all.

Community-led renewable energy initiatives provide a compelling model for bridging this gap. Decentralized energy systems, such as community-owned solar farms or microgrids, empower local populations by giving them direct control over energy resources. These projects provide reliable and affordable energy, generate local employment, enhance community resilience, and reduce dependency on external energy sources. Furthermore, they promote social equity by integrating marginalized voices into decision-making processes and ensuring that renewable energy transitions' economic and environmental benefits are shared broadly.

By integrating equitable energy access into broader economic strategies, governments and stakeholders can harness the transformative power of energy to foster sustainable and inclusive development. These efforts are essential for bridging socioeconomic divides and achieving a just energy transition that aligns with global sustainability goals.

Table 1 summarizes this study's findings, highlighting key barriers, actionable strategies, and their implications for achieving an equitable and sustainable energy transition.

Table 1. Summary of key findings

Key Words	Key Findings / Barriers	Proposed Strategies / Solutions
Economic Barriers	The high cost of renewable energy technologies limits access for low-income communities, and inadequate financial mechanisms fail to support vulnerable groups.	Implement targeted subsidies, grants, low-interest loans, and tax incentives to reduce cost barriers for underserved communities.
Infrastructure Disparities	Unequal distribution of energy infrastructure between rural and urban areas limits access to renewable energy in underserved regions.	Invest in infrastructure development for rural and remote areas to ensure equitable access to renewable energy systems.
Policy Gaps	Lack of emphasis on equity in national and global sustainability policies; environmental goals prioritized over equitable energy access.	Integrate equity considerations into sustainability policies, linking energy equity goals with international frameworks like SDG 7.

Table 1. (continued)

Key Words	Key Findings / Barriers	Proposed Strategies / Solutions
Social and Cultural Barriers	Marginalized groups are excluded from energy decision-making processes; cultural norms hinder the adoption of renewable energy technologies.	Foster inclusivity in policymaking through participatory approaches and representation of marginalized communities in energy planning.
Equity-First Policies	Traditional market-driven approaches exclude vulnerable populations and increase socioeconomic disparities.	Develop and implement equity-centered policies, such as California’s Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing and Scotland’s Warm Homes Fund.
Community-Led Initiatives	Grassroots projects combine sustainability with social equity, creating local benefits and energy independence.	Promote local ownership of renewable energy projects, as seen in Denmark’s Samsø Island and North American tribal renewable energy projects.
Technological Advancements	AI and smart grid systems improve energy distribution and monitoring, benefiting price-sensitive consumers.	Use AI for demand response systems and smart meters to enhance equitable energy access and optimize resource allocation.
Policy Alignment	Linking energy policies to SDGs ensures sustainable energy benefits align with broader equity goals.	Measure policy success through equity metrics like affordability, access, and social inclusion alongside carbon reduction targets.
Participatory Policymaking	Marginalized populations are excluded from energy decision-making processes.	Engage underrepresented groups through community consultations, stakeholder forums, and collaborative planning initiatives.
Financial Support	Cost barriers prevent underserved communities from accessing sustainable energy technologies.	Implement targeted financial mechanisms like rural electrification subsidies and support for small-scale renewable energy projects.
Education and Training	Lack of knowledge and skills in communities to participate in energy transitions.	Introduce technical training and educational campaigns to empower communities and create local employment opportunities.
Monitoring and Accountability	Absence of frameworks to track equity outcomes in sustainable energy projects.	Develop robust monitoring frameworks with metrics for distributional impacts, independent audits, and community oversight committees.
Economic Impacts of Equitable Energy Access	Economic benefits of renewable energy are unevenly distributed, leaving underserved communities with limited access to economic opportunities and widening income disparities.	Implement community-led renewable energy projects to foster local economic opportunities, develop policies that prioritize equitable energy access, and create targeted subsidies and infrastructure investments to ensure inclusivity in energy transitions.

4. Discussion

This study’s findings underscore the complex interplay between sustainability and energy equity. They reveal critical barriers and propose actionable strategies for fostering an equitable energy transition.

Economic constraints emerge as a primary obstacle to achieving energy equity. Despite recent cost reductions, the high initial costs of renewable energy technologies remain prohibitive for low-income households and underserved communities. This financial inaccessibility perpetuates socioeconomic disparities and underscores the necessity of targeted subsidies, low-interest loans, and other innovative financial mechanisms to bridge the affordability gap. Furthermore, disparities in infrastructure between rural and urban areas highlight a pressing need for equitable

investment in energy systems to ensure rural regions benefit from renewable energy transitions [32].

The study also emphasizes the policy gap in addressing energy equity. National and global sustainability policies often prioritize environmental and economic dimensions over equity, leaving marginalized populations without adequate representation in energy transitions. This finding aligns with existing literature emphasizing the need for equity-centered approaches integrating energy justice into policy design and implementation [33,34].

Social and cultural factors further compound energy inequities. Exclusion from decision-making processes and resistance to renewable energy adoption in culturally traditional communities highlight the importance of fostering inclusivity and participation. Policymakers must recognize the diverse social and cultural contexts in which energy

systems operate, ensuring that energy solutions align with community-specific values and needs [35].

Aligning energy equity with sustainability goals requires a paradigm shift in energy planning and implementation. Equity-first policies, community-led initiatives, and advanced technologies such as AI-powered systems offer promising pathways for achieving this alignment. Case studies such as California's Solar on Multifamily Affordable Housing program and Denmark's Samsø Island project illustrate how integrating social equity into energy transitions can yield multidimensional benefits [36].

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the critical barriers, strategies, and pathways for integrating sustainability principles with energy equity. The key barriers identified include economic obstacles, such as the high upfront costs of renewable technologies; infrastructure challenges that result in unequal energy access between rural and urban areas; policy gaps that fail to prioritize equity in national and international sustainability frameworks; and social and cultural barriers that exclude marginalized groups from energy decision-making. In response, several practical strategies were identified, including community-led renewable energy projects, equity-first policies, technological innovations like AI and smart grids, and integrating energy equity with the broader SDGs. Pathways for overcoming these barriers emphasize the importance of inclusive policymaking, financial mechanisms tailored to low-income populations, capacity-building efforts, and robust monitoring systems to measure equity outcomes. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive, coordinated efforts to ensure energy systems are both sustainable and equitable.

This research offers novel insights into how energy equity can be systematically aligned with sustainability efforts, particularly in the context of policy and practice. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on achieving a

Just transition to renewable energy systems by bridging the gap between energy access and sustainability. It highlights that energy equity is not an isolated issue but a crucial element of sustainable development that encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions. This work provides a framework for policymakers, technologists, and community leaders to integrate equity into sustainable energy initiatives, ensuring that the benefits of the energy transition are distributed fairly across all segments of society.

This study urges the collaboration of policymakers, technologists, and communities to prioritize energy equity in the global transition toward sustainable energy systems. The integration of equity should not be seen as an afterthought but as a foundational component of energy policies and technological advancements. Policymakers must ensure that their policies are environmentally effective and socially inclusive, addressing the needs of underserved and marginalized populations. Technologists should focus on developing and deploying innovative solutions that are affordable and accessible for all. At the same time, communities must actively shape the energy systems that

directly affect them. A collective commitment to these principles will foster a more just, equitable, and sustainable energy future for all.

Looking forward, there are several important avenues for further research to enhance our understanding of energy equity within sustainability frameworks. One key area is exploring localized energy equity solutions that can be tailored to specific regional, cultural, and economic contexts. Investigating how communities adapt to and adopt sustainable energy technologies will offer valuable insights into practical implementation strategies. Additionally, future research should examine how global frameworks like the SDGs can further align with national and local policies to ensure that energy equity is consistently prioritized. Future studies can contribute to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of integrating equity into the transition to sustainable energy by focusing on grassroots innovations and global institutional collaborations.

6. Implications for Global Practice

Policymakers play a crucial role in shaping the future of sustainable energy systems, and they must prioritize energy equity when crafting energy policies. Equity-centered policies should ensure all populations, particularly those in underserved or marginalized communities, access to affordable, reliable, clean energy. Policymakers must design frameworks that support the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure into rural and low-income urban areas, bridging gaps in energy access. They should also consider financial mechanisms such as subsidies or low-interest loans to reduce the economic barriers for disadvantaged populations. Furthermore, integrating energy equity into national and international sustainability frameworks, such as aligning with the SDGs, will ensure that these policies effectively achieve environmental goals and reduce social inequalities. A key guideline for policymakers is to involve all stakeholders, including marginalized communities, in the decision-making process to ensure that policies address real needs and promote long-term, inclusive energy solutions.

Technologists have an essential role in addressing the technological barriers that prevent equitable access to renewable energy. Innovations should make sustainable energy technologies, such as solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage solutions, more affordable, scalable, and accessible to low-income communities. Technological solutions, like smart grids, AI, and decentralized energy systems, can be key enablers in ensuring energy resources are distributed fairly and efficiently. For example, AI can optimize energy production and consumption, ensuring that renewable energy is directed where it is most needed, especially in underdeveloped regions. Technologists should also work on creating energy solutions that are culturally appropriate and tailored to the specific needs of local communities. By bridging the gap between high-tech solutions and low-income areas, technological innovations can play a significant role in ensuring that all share the benefits of renewable energy.

Communities must be empowered to actively participate in shaping the future of energy systems. Grassroots

movements have proven to be powerful catalysts for driving change, and communities should be given the tools and resources to advocate for equitable energy solutions. This includes educating on renewable energy options, financial mechanisms, and policy processes, ensuring community members can make informed decisions and push for energy equity in their local contexts. Strategies for community empowerment should focus on fostering collective action, building partnerships with policymakers and technologists, and creating local advocacy networks that can influence energy policy at the regional and national levels. Moreover, communities must be involved in the planning, implementing, and managing renewable energy projects, ensuring that these projects meet the unique needs of local populations and contribute to sustainable development goals.

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