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From COP30 to Santa Marta: Defining Feasible Pathways for Fossil Fuel Phaseout

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Abstract

The COP30 negotiations in Belém exposed the entrenched interests and political economy constraints at the heart of fossil fuel phaseout.

This report analyses the coalitions and motivations shaping international positions on transition and identifies the economic, social and legal questions required to develop credible pathways for managed fossil fuel decline. Looking ahead to the Santa Marta conference, it explores how coordination among early-moving states may help articulate differentiated phaseout pathways capable of shaping the next phase of climate leadership.

1. Introduction: What COP30 revealed

COP30, the most recent United Nations Conference of the Parties, took place in November 2025 in Belém, Brazil. The conference was positioned as an implementation COP that would test the ability of multilateral negotiations to limit global temperature rise.

It took place against a complex geopolitical backdrop with shifting sands of global interest in climate mitigation, for instance with the US, China and India all absent from the leaders' summit.[1] Whilst COPs are often judged as successes or failures in terms of negotiating outcomes, COP30 is better understood as a *diagnostic* moment in global climate politics. COP30 confirmed that fossil fuel phaseout is not blocked by denial of climate science, but by deeper political economy barriers: entrenched fossil fuel interests, fiscal dependencies and the political risks governments face when addressing structural change. In this context climate leadership increasingly depends on developing credible and differentiated pathways for fossil fuel phaseout.

The arbiter of a successful COP to many observers is the extent of discussion, strength of decision-making, and clarity of commitments around fossil fuel transition or phaseout. In this respect, COP30 generated a significant, novel outcome in instigating a further conference in April 2026 in Santa Marta, Colombia (jointly hosted with the Netherlands).

The conference is intended to develop practical pathways for an orderly transition and to contribute to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) roadmap process.[2] Over 80 countries publicly affirmed the initiative, with confirmed pledges to participation ranging from the UK to the Marshall Islands.[3] Whilst momentum for the roadmap and conference originated within COP30 (through the Brazilian presidency), the proposal was ultimately accepted outside the formal UN talks, and the Brazilian presidency announced that the roadmap would be presented at the next COP.[4] Operating alongside, rather than within, UNFCCC processes and its condition of absolute consensus, the Santa Marta conference offers greater flexibility for coordinating practical approaches to roadmap implementation among participating states.

Debate over whether to mention the roadmap in the draft text from COP30 became a dividing line between countries, regional groups and other blocs. It was reported that some pro-phaseout countries threatened to block the text if it omitted mention of the roadmap.[5]

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The conference clarified a tension between two political logics (often working together in any one country's position): one oriented toward multilateral cooperation; the other prioritising sovereignty, development autonomy, risk management and political stability.[6] The evident inability to agree on a fossil fuel phaseout roadmap reflected not only major differences in ambition, but also the absence of practical pathways that reconcile international climate goals with diverse national political economies.

This report evaluates what COP30 revealed about coalitions supporting or opposing fossil fuel phaseout, explores the questions likely to shape discussions at the Santa Marta conference, and identifies archetypal fossil fuel phaseout scenarios that may offer opportunities for climate leadership. Our analysis draws on a critical review of materials published during COP, largely from the grey and academic literature. Because COP negotiations are confidential, our understanding of the coalitions surrounding the roadmap necessarily relies on inference regarding the motivations behind states' positions. Interviews with decision-makers would add little value at this stage given the performative and evolving nature of the Santa Marta conference, which is intended to generate political momentum and to clarify positions for participating countries.

In subsequent sections of this report, we identify the key alliances in the roadmap debate and the motivations shaping these coalitions (section 2). Section 3 then outlines the questions – economic, social and legal - that must be addressed as countries begin to develop practical pathways for the managed decline of fossil fuels. These pathways will inevitably vary across different national contexts and decarbonisation trajectories. Finally, we examine a series of archetypal scenarios of fossil fuel phaseout, illustrated through country case studies, which highlight emerging opportunities for climate leadership.

2. Phaseout coalitions and motivations

COP30 clarified that the dividing line in climate diplomacy is not only ambition versus obstruction, but feasibility versus prescription.

While some states explicitly support a fossil fuel phaseout roadmap and others strongly resist it, the decisive group lies in between: countries whose support is conditional on economic, developmental and political safeguards. The Brazilian presidency catalysed this clarification with President Lula's early call for roadmaps on fossil fuels and deforestation, forcing delegations to signal positions more clearly than in previous COPs.[7]

Yet the consensus rule of the UNFCCC remains ill-suited to resolving highly distributive questions such as fossil fuel phaseout. The proposed Santa Marta process therefore represents not a substitute for COP negotiations, but a complementary platform intended to advance practical pathways for fossil fuel phaseout, particularly among countries prepared to move ahead. Operating alongside the UNFCCC process, it prioritises ambition, feasibility and implementation over unanimity.

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2.1. Coalitions

Four broad alignments in the fossil fuel phaseout debate were visible at COP30; these positions are not mutually exclusive and there may be movement between them. While these alignments shape the broader context of fossil fuel phaseout, the Santa Marta conference is primarily oriented towards countries already prepared to advance transition pathways, and as such are likely to attend. The four key alignments are as follows:

a. **Structural supporters:** AOSIS (the Alliance of Small Island States), the European Union, and most OECD countries, alongside Brazil and blocs such as AILAC (the Independent Association of Latin America and the Caribbean) and the Environmental Integrity Group. These groups support, at least in principle, a formalised pathway to fossil fuel phaseout.

b. **Structural opponents:** major hydrocarbon exporters, including Russia, Saudi Arabia and much of the Arab Group and OPEC (Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries), resist roadmap language that could constrain production and use.

c. **Procedural sceptics:** some developing country groupings argue that the framing of a phaseout roadmap is premature or misplaced, often preferring climate finance to be prioritised before new mitigation commitments (for instance Nigeria,[8, 9] and Indonesia[10]).

d. **Conditional powers:** China and India could occupy pivotal positions here, although their attendance at Santa Marta is doubtful. Neither openly rejected phaseout at COP30 (as indicated by national media),[11] but both signalled resistance to prescriptive timelines that do not reflect national development strategies. Given their influence within BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), the G77+China and the Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs), their stance could shape the wider geopolitical context in which the Santa Marta process unfolds.

Opposition to the roadmap does not necessarily equate to rejection of fossil fuel transition. For many developing states, resistance reflects concerns over development autonomy, stranded-asset exposure and unmet finance commitments. The sequencing of phaseout is therefore geopolitical: it intersects with concerns around North–South equity,[12, 13] industrial policy and fear of stranded assets,[14, 15] as well as long-standing debates around the "Right to Development",[16] and the more recent climate finance debates.

2.2. Motivations

Motivations across these alignments are heterogeneous but cluster, as far as one can infer, around four drivers. The first is energy security and fiscal stability. Hydrocarbon-dependent states (including export-based manufacturing economies) seek to avoid destabilising revenue shocks, asset stranding and supply disruptions. The second is developmental equity. Many developing countries resist uniform decarbonisation schedules that fail to differentiate by historical responsibility, income level or fiscal capacity.

The third is climate finance credibility. The Brazilian presidency's "Baku to Belém" finance ambition[17] highlighted that for many countries, enhanced mitigation is contingent on predictable and scaled-up financial flows. Where finance commitments are perceived as unreliable, support for phaseout language weakens. The fourth is domestic political constraints. Populist pressures, cost-of-living concerns, and industrial competitiveness shape national positions. Even states rhetorically supportive of transition need to maintain domestic legitimacy.

Two conclusions follow. First, positions on fossil fuel phaseout are better understood as a continuum rather than a binary divide. Second, the pivotal actors in global climate politics remain conditional states whose support depends on credible economic, social and legal safeguards. The Santa Marta conference is, however, primarily oriented to the coordination of those countries already prepared to advance phaseout. By developing practical pathways for managed fossil fuel decline, these early movers may help shape the context under which broader participation is possible, in particular by these conditional states. This raises important questions for the Santa Marta agenda and how it can balance climate ambition with political and economic feasibility.

3. The Santa Marta Agenda

The build-up to the Santa Marta conference has prioritised economic, social and legal frameworks for phaseout.

Given the economic, developmental and political constraints identified in the previous section, the conference is intended to advance practical pathways for managed fossil fuel decline for countries already prepared to move forward. Operating outside of, yet alongside, official UNFCCC processes, Santa Marta is designed less as a forum for persuading reluctant states than as a platform for coordination among early movers.

The questions explored below therefore reflect the challenges these countries must address in order to demonstrate credible transition pathways. These pathways over time may help reduce transition risks and shape the conditions under which broader participation in climate ambition is possible.

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3.1. Economic and financial questions

A leading concern for countries participating in the Santa Marta process will be the economic and financial ramifications of fossil fuel phaseout. Many of these countries must manage transition in economies that remain deeply embedded in fossil fuel production, use, trade and industrial supply chains. The following questions therefore focus on how governments can design economically credible pathways for managed fossil fuel decline.

3.1.1. How can countries commit to a managed transition from fossil fuels without undermining industrial competitiveness, destabilizing public finances, or triggering stranded-asset crises?

The roadmap could set out measures to reduce macroeconomic risk, if transition pathways are to be economically and politically viable. For many participating countries fossil fuels remain embedded in fiscal revenues and industrial competitiveness. Managing the decline of these sectors therefore requires policies that avoid race-to-bottom extraction and unmanaged asset collapse. Ultimately, the roadmap will need explicit recognition that stranded asset risk and loss in fossil fuel rents is a real problem (with current fossil fuel infrastructure enough to breach 1.5°C).[18] Financial regulators may need to require disclosure or phaseout planning, including long lead times for fossil fuel capital winddown that are aligned with existing asset lifetimes.[19] Direct support for domestic industry in these countries will also be vital. The disproportionate impact of stranded assets on developing countries will need to be substantively addressed and incorporated into any sequencing of phaseout.[20]

3.1.2. How will changes in trade flows be managed?

A roadmap that does not outline replacements for fossil fuel or related manufacturing exports will likely be rejected by key nations. There is also a need to recognise the risk of increased dependency on imported clean technologies by these nations. Support for these nations could involve preferential access to clean energy markets and critical transition minerals to support domestic manufacturing of low carbon technologies. This would ensure that current exporters are integrated into new global value chains. In this context, countries such as Chile[21] and Indonesia[22] are already showing leadership by seeking to reposition themselves within emerging clean technology supply chains, particularly in relation to lithium, nickel, and battery manufacturing.

3.1.3. How can developing nations that are fossil fuel dependent be financially supported throughout a phaseout?

Many Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and LDMCs are already burdened by high levels of debt and therefore fiscally constrained.[23] Previous climate finance promises have repeatedly been broken.[24, 25] Mechanisms that protect countries with limited fiscal space to fund an energy transition will be key. A renewed commitment to climate financing with clear and predictable funding streams is required to bring low-income, fossil fuel dependent states on board.[26] Other mechanisms to reduce burden on these states could involve debt forgiveness or restructuring in line with managed decline commitments and clean energy pathways, without this becoming a coercive dynamic. Advancing pathways that reduce investment risk, stabilise energy supply, and support domestic industry directly address the core constraints of fossil fuel dependent LDCs.[27]

3.2. Social questions

Social issues will be central to the credibility of any phaseout pathway. Governments participating in the Santa Marta process will presumably aim to demonstrate that managed fossil fuel decline is compatible with energy affordability, worker protection, and regional economic stability.

3.2.1. How are costs and benefits distributed?

India, China, LMDCs and LDCs have long argued that global climate action has been inequitable, for both strategic and substantive reasons. The roadmap must try and avoid perpetuating unequal burdens; one that does will be rejected by developing countries that run the risk of lock-in. How, therefore, the roadmap addresses this question will be central to the credibility of any transition pathway and its wider political legitimacy. Domestic reporting in India stated that the fossil fuel phaseout plan must ensure that "countries are not called to adhere to a uniform pathway for it".[28] Other reports from COP30 suggest that India continues to adopt a strong position on this issue, arguing that developed countries bear greater responsibility for near-term emissions reductions because of their historical contributions to global emissions.[29]

Countries advancing pathways will therefore want to demonstrate differentiated timelines for fossil fuel phaseout dependent on their (a) historical responsibility for emissions, (b) capability to enable a transition, and (c) level of development - following the UNFCCC principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). This requires clear commitments from wealthier countries to move first to phaseout fossil fuels (beyond coal). The roadmap will need to address how it ensures basic development goals for specific countries (including access to energy, electricity, clean cooking and transport). It could potentially include a country pathway, therefore, that is linked to income level, per-capita emissions, and historical responsibility, not just aggregate emissions.

Equity principles suggest that Global North producer states should move first, particularly where extraction is already more costly and inefficient, as a key signal of climate leadership and as an example of how managed fossil fuel decline can be implemented in practice.[30]

3.2.2. How can fossil fuel decline be managed whilst guaranteeing a secure energy supply?

This question is crucial for the credibility of any phaseout pathway, particularly for countries that remain dependent on fossil fuel imports. Any transition pathway that does not address risks of blackouts, price spikes and import dependencies will not be politically viable. Diversifying energy supply, as well as mitigating against political risks to supply (and thereby supporting energy independence) will be key steps.[31] A pathway must demonstrate that it is compatible with increased energy access, is affordable for countries with limited fiscal capability, and is resilient to supply shocks. Countries such as Morocco[32] and Kenya[33] have, for example, prioritised renewable expansion partly to reduce fossil fuel dependence while maintaining energy security.

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3.2.3. What does a just fossil fuel phaseout look like for workers and communities across global, national and local scales?

Fossil fuel jobs are regionally concentrated in many countries (for instance, in India, China, South Africa, Indonesia, and Nigeria), creating significant domestic political and social risks if transitions are not accompanied by credible alternatives. Equity principles for managed decline suggest that it should be prioritised in "diversified, wealthier economies that can better absorb the transitional impacts."[34] For early movers credible transition pathways must therefore include plans to protect workers and communities affected by fossil fuel decline. However, transition plans cannot be imposed top-down without buy-in from national and local governments, trade unions, and other community actors.[35] South Africa's Presidential Climate Commission has sought, for example, to integrate labour protection, regional development and energy transition planning through its Just Energy Transition framework.[36, 37]

3.3. Legal questions

There are a number of legal questions to be addressed at Santa Marta. Once governments begin to develop credible pathways for fossil fuel phaseout, legal instruments will play a critical role in providing durability, predictability, and investor confidence for the transition.

3.3.1. Which legal instruments can help reduce transition risk enough to unlock differentiated schedules for fossil fuel phaseout?

Legal instruments can help to reduce transition risk, especially for producers and fiscally constrained states, whilst preserving equity and domestic legitimacy. Legal instruments which build towards managed decline in fossil fuel use could include:

- A legal moratorium on new licensing;[38]
- Phaseout legislation;[39]
- Fossil fuel subsidy reform law;[40]
- Just transition clauses;[41]
- Public procurement and state-aid frameworks for clean alternatives.[42]

Together, this could present a minimum legal baseline for credible transition planning.

3.3.2. Which countries are best placed to trigger building this legal framework?

There will likely be a variety of countries that can act as champions of these legal frameworks. As evidenced by COP30 it is unlikely to be:

- India or China: these states play too large a role in global trade patterns and energy security to move first on the decline of fossil fuel production but will be crucial to scaling these legal frameworks once they have been established;
- Major fossil fuel producers: as disruptors, such states will likely only engage once legal norms are established elsewhere;
- LDCs: these countries need protection and finance and are therefore unlikely to take on the burden of moving first.

In practice legal innovation is most likely to emerge from countries already experimenting with fossil fuel decline, strong climate governance frameworks, and proven climate ambition. These include the states moving to phaseout fossil fuel subsidies (Coalition to Phase Out Fossil Fuel Subsidies, including Colombia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the UK); countries with established climate legislation (such as the UK, Denmark, Portugal, and Chile, which have successful coal phaseout policies); and governments that have introduced restrictions on new oil and gas licensing (including France, Denmark and New Zealand).

Early experimentation with legal frameworks is also emerging in Global South contexts steered by Just Energy Transition Partnerships (for example in South Africa, Indonesia, and Vietnam). These initiatives, particularly from countries that presently depend on fossil fuel production like Colombia, illustrate how legal instruments can underpin credible transition pathways and provide models that may be adapted in different national contexts.

Together, these economic, social and legal dimensions illustrate the foundations of credible phaseout pathways. The following section explores how such pathways may take shape in three such contexts.

4. Climate leadership implications and phaseout scenarios

Since no international mechanism exists to compel states to phase out fossil fuel supply and use, fossil fuel phaseout is a collective action problem.

In the present system of states, this problem can only be resolved through leadership. Leadership by best practice and policy experimentation presents, accordingly, the principle mechanism through which global norms around phaseout may shift,[43] and Santa Marta offers a platform where such emerging pathways may be rehearsed and shared. As such, in the following we discuss three country case studies and the fossil fuel phaseout scenarios they represent in relation to the questions articulated above. These economic, social and legal frameworks are mutually reinforcing but manifest differently across the case studies, highlighting archetypal phaseout pathways for countries of similar development and fossil fuel producing and consumption status. Together these case studies illustrate how different national contexts generate distinct pathways for managed fossil fuel decline and therefore different forms of climate leadership.

4.1. Netherlands: Prime movers for early phaseout

The Netherlands' desire to lead by example is clearly signposted in their position as co-host of the Santa Marta conference. In 2019 the Netherlands also legislated for carbon neutrality by 2050, with an interim 55% reduction target by 2030. Although power sector emissions have halved since 2018, the country is challenged by continuing dependence on fossil fuels for electricity generation, with almost half of generation capacity from natural gas and coal[44] and given the country's role as an important hub for global fossil fuel trading. This despite the state having the largest proportion of solar PV in their electricity system in 2022.[45] Continued transition away from fossil fuel-based power production will be needed to meet their target for a carbon neutral electricity system by 2035.

There is therefore still some way to go for fossil fuel phaseout in the country, and several areas where leadership will be critical. Both continued reliance on natural gas for electricity generation and the state's role as an oil, gas and chemicals trading hub demand a clear pathway for the transition to renewables.

At the same time, it is imperative that this pathway is socially acceptable, particularly given the increasing challenges posed by populist politics in the country. Coal mining itself has already been phased out in the Netherlands, providing a model for further transition, in particular how this can be managed alongside regional development.[46] Similarly, shale gas production was banned in 2018, an outcome attributed to strong public resistance.[47]

Therefore in social terms, there appears to be strong public consensus around fossil fuel transition as well as state experience in managing the adverse regional impacts of declining production.

The Netherlands is an advanced economy historically entangled with the fossil fuel industry. As noted in one report “natural gas is to the Netherlands what oil is to the Gulf States”.[48] To further support social acceptability, subsidies and clear financing of the transition to renewables will be required, and, as an advanced economy, the state will be required to finance the transition domestically. From a political perspective, phaseout legislation will be required to underpin and accelerate the process of transition.

As noted, as well as fossil fuel production, the country plays an important role in the global oil and gas trade. For instance, the port city of Rotterdam is a key oil refining and chemicals hub, carrying a risk of spatially concentrated economic impacts in the course of transition. Any transition from carbon-intensive production methods, whether for particular materials or for petrochemical products themselves, carries the risk of carbon leakage: the reorientation of trade to jurisdictions with less regulated production standards. The European Union’s introduction of a legal instrument and policy tool - the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) - aims to act as a corrective to this. Discussions around extending the CBAM to cover the chemicals sector[49] could help protect the economic and industrial competitiveness of hubs such as Rotterdam. However, the CBAM will need to be accompanied by domestic phaseout legislation in the Netherlands as the primary mechanism to drive transition.

The Netherlands is forging a pathway of early exit, shaping new norms around phaseout, demonstrated through attempts at climate leadership. By delivering economic measures (subsidies and finance) to affected industries and industrial regions, the state would improve the social acceptability of the transition pathway, and politically this could be affirmed through phaseout legislation. In this way the three parts of the framework need to work in concert to deliver a just transition at pace in the Netherlands. This type of pathway illustrates how advanced economies can begin to operationalise fossil fuel phaseout, providing a practical reference point for other industrialised producer and consumer countries.

4.2. Brazil: Conditional middle-income positions

Brazil's role in the COP presidency positioned it at the centre of emerging efforts to define practical pathways for fossil fuel transition.[50] It also has an extensive renewable energy network, with 90% of electricity generation from low-carbon sources in 2024.[51] However, it is also a net oil exporter,[52] and additional activities around highway building, the subsidised conversion of pasture to soy (opening up further deforestation), and opening new on- and off-shore oil and gas fields for exploration – all challenge domestic climate credibility.[53, 54] Similarly, the discovery of offshore pre-salt oil reserves has led to competition with renewable investments for the past two decades.[55]

In social and political terms, internal conflict within the state is evident in the contrasting interests of the economic ministries (mines, energy and agriculture) and those more oriented to climate justice (foreign affairs, environment).[56] Resolving such domestic political tensions will be a decisive factor in Brazil's development of a phaseout pathway. Marina Silva, Brazil's environment minister, encouraged support for the roadmap, whilst also highlighting that it would be voluntary, stating: "When we have a terrain or environment that is quite grim, it is good that we have a map. But the map does not force us to travel, or to climb".[57] Silva also drew attention to Brazil's role as both producer and consumer of fossil fuels, but stated that "Brazil is different, because Brazil, if it wants to, need not depend on fossil fuels".[58]

In terms of economic questions, upstream oil and gas production is viewed as an important source of fiscal revenue supporting socioeconomic programmes (for instance, around poverty alleviation).[59, 60] Brazil's National Development Bank (BNDES) has played an important role in financing the energy transition (for instance, the expansion of renewables).[61] Expanding international climate finance flows into Brazil could help facilitate further and faster transition from fossil fuel reliance, outlining a phaseout pathway for other industrialising middle-income countries (or emerging economies). India, as another member of the BRICS group, is positioned to take a similar role and pathway with these conditions in place.

The political will needed to mobilise phaseout legislation, and in turn climate finance, will be dependent on social acceptance. Brazil's 27 states vary widely in levels of poverty,[62] creating complexity in achieving uniform social acceptance of transition measures across highly unequal regions. The economic, social and legal dimensions of the Brazilian energy transition are therefore mutually reinforcing, where with political will to enact phaseout legislation there could be a greater economic case for transition as well as improved climate finance inflows. A better economic footing could bolster social acceptance and support poverty alleviation, without dependence on fossil fuels to do so.

4.3. Colombia: Development-centred approaches to managed decline

Colombia is a fossil fuel dependent developing state that nevertheless stands out for its climate ambition. It exemplifies the internal contradictions of many Global South states as they pursue domestic economic development whilst remaining active in the global climate arena. Colombia is the world's 6th largest coal exporter,[63] but it is also, critically, a co-host of the Santa Marta conference taking place within its jurisdiction (indeed, Santa Marta itself is a coal port). In 2022, Gustavo Petro won the presidential election in Colombia and had committed to end the granting of new oil and gas exploration contracts. Notably, this made Colombia the first large Global South country to make a pledge of this kind.[64]

Whilst Brazil's phaseout appears reliant on the political will to change as a primary driver, Colombia is much more dependent on coal, both economically and socially. The role as co-host at Santa Marta demonstrates a strong desire to lead as a fossil fuel dependent developing state, whilst also recognising the internal inconsistencies of their position. Colombia's prominence as co-host poses a challenge to the Santa Marta agenda, that of untangling fossil fuel dependency from development in developing states. It highlights the political strength, but economic precarity and vulnerability of their own position, a position which demands an immediate financial package of support to alleviate.

A particular economic and social challenge to phasing out fossil fuel production in the state is the narrative that extraction is "necessary to development".[65, 66] Coal mining as well as unconventional oil and gas exploitation are seen as providing jobs and revenues for the states, with the corollary that there are fiscal risks to government policies and programmes without them (including around development and infrastructure).[67] The phaseout pledge attracted a lot of opposition from national media, reflecting narratives around discourses of delay.[68] There are no apparent efforts to curtail production from contracts already granted, and the commitment has not been reinforced through legislation, posing risks in the upcoming 2026 presidential elections.[69] This draws attention to the importance of having legal instruments in place to withstand domestic electoral cycles, and to build long-term political signals towards phaseout.

The association of fossil fuels with development discourses entrenches an over-reliance on commodities which may be affected by changing global demand in future. Climate finance plays a pivotal role in breaking the link between development and fossil fuel production by offering an alternative source of finance for development programmes. Parallels can be drawn between Colombia and South Africa in terms of these internal tensions and as fossil fuel dependent developing states engaging in managed decline and focused on stability and development.

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5. Conclusion

The Santa Marta conference has the potential to go beyond the structural tensions highlighted by the COP30 negotiations, instead paving a way forward for both national governance and international cooperation, whilst remaining mindful of present political constraints.

It is worth recognising that opposition to the roadmap is often reflective of domestic fears around development, fiscal stability, energy security, and social disruption rather than rejection of the transition itself. This implies that movement is possible if these constraints are addressed: which makes it vital that the economic, social and legal questions - as well as their interconnections - are openly addressed to allow credible fossil fuel phaseout pathways to emerge. The configuration of economic, social and legal varies for the phaseout pathways of each country.

A key task of Santa Marta will be to identify which countries can pioneer on different dimensions of transition, and how these experiences can begin to inform international efforts to manage fossil fuel decline. In sum, the question is no longer whether fossil fuels will decline, but whether that decline will be managed or chaotic. The countries best placed to lead are advanced producers capable of absorbing transition risk and middle-income states able to demonstrate development-compatible phaseout pathways. Santa Marta will test whether coordinated experimentation among ‘early-moving’ states can generate the credible transition pathways that consensus-based multilateralism has struggled to define.

The question is no longer whether fossil fuels will decline, but whether that decline will be managed or chaotic.

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