

REAL-WORLD SCENARIO

APPLYING A DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE LENS



Transmission corridor

A national utility, in partnership with private renewable developers, plans to build a 400 kV transmission line to connect newly developed wind and solar farms in a remote region to the national grid. The corridor crosses agricultural land, communal grazing areas, and small settlements.

*This scenario brief forms part of a series of resources by IHRB on **Distributional Justice and the Role of Business**, which examines how to operationalise fairness in the energy transition to support private sector decision making.*

1. Decision and Transition Context

A public-private consortium plans to build a 400 kV transmission line spanning 180 kilometres across a rural agricultural region. The project is part of a national push to:

- replace ageing coal generation,
 - unlock renewable energy projects already under construction,
 - stabilise electricity supply,
 - meet emissions targets under international commitments.
- The corridor is selected because of:
- proximity to renewable energy generation zones,
 - existing substations at either end,
 - lower construction cost relative to underground alternatives.
- At the same time:
- renewable build-out is accelerating faster than grid expansion,
 - pressure to deliver infrastructure quickly is high,
 - communities hosting infrastructure experience disruption without direct control over electricity pricing or allocation.

2. Distributional Context

- Most households rely on commercial agriculture, farm work, and small-scale grazing.
- Land ownership is concentrated among commercial farmers, while:
 - farm workers reside on land they do not own,
 - informal grazing users depend on access to the same land identified for the development,
 - some settlements lack secure tenure documentation.
- Youth unemployment is high
- Electricity supply in the area is unreliable
- Previous infrastructure projects delivered:
 - compensation to title holders,
 - limited recognition of informal users,
 - minimal long-term local benefit.

3. Distributive Justice Risks Arising From Pending Decision

Land use risks:

- Transmission servitudes restrict land use under and around pylons.
- Grazing routes and seasonal movement patterns may be disrupted.
- Farm productivity may be reduced during construction.

Unequal compensation flows:

- Payments are made to registered landowners.
- Farm workers and informal land users receive no direct compensation.

Diffuse benefits:

- Electricity flows into the national grid.
- Local communities experience visual intrusion and construction disturbance but no direct reduction in electricity costs.

Employment mismatch:

- Specialised construction contractors are brought in from outside the region.
- Local residents may only access temporary, low-skilled jobs.

Timing risks:

- Land disturbance begins immediately.
- National energy stability benefits materialise later and elsewhere.

4. Company Response

Participation and recognition:

- The company maps not only landowners, but also:
 - farm workers residing on affected land,
 - informal livestock users,
 - roadside traders along the corridor.
- Seasonal land-use patterns are documented before finalising micro-siting of pylons.
- Engagement includes practical discussions about construction timing relative to harvest cycles.
- Certain pylon locations are shifted to avoid key livestock routes.

Transparency and justifiability:

- The company publishes:
 - the non-negotiable technical constraints,
 - what aspects of routing remain adjustable,

- how compensation values are calculated.
- Clear timelines are shared for each construction phase.
- Contractors are required to disclose local hiring numbers publicly.

Local economic participation:

- Although high-voltage installation requires specialised external contractors, the company encourages contractors to:
 - source catering locally,
 - procure fresh produce from local farmers,
 - contract local transport providers where feasible.
- Short-term workers are offered:
 - certified safety training,
 - basic electrical awareness training,
 - job-shadowing opportunities with technical teams.

5. Distributive Justice Outcomes

Mitigating harms:

- Land access agreements include:
 - compensation for temporary disruption as well as permanent servitudes,
 - restoration of topsoil and fencing after construction,
 - construction schedules aligned with harvest cycles.
- Temporary grazing corridors are maintained where feasible.
- A grievance mechanism is operational before construction begins.

Creating and sharing benefits:

- Skills and jobs:
 - Local workers are employed in vegetation clearing, security, traffic control, and logistics.

- Participants receive certified safety training and basic electrical awareness training.
- Selected workers participate in short-term job-shadowing with technical teams.
- Economic participation:
 - Local farmers supply catering produce to contractors during peak construction.
 - Small transport providers are contracted for material movement within designated sections.
 - A vendor registry connects local businesses to construction-related procurement.

Local infrastructure improvements:

- Access roads upgraded for construction remain in improved condition.
- Temporary water points installed for construction use remain accessible after works conclude.