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Low-Carbon Transition Models for Greenfield Gas Projects: A Roadmap for Emerging Energy Markets

Magnus Okechukwu Kanu [1*], Peter Ifechukwude Egbumokei [2], Elemele Ogu [3], Wags Numoipiri Digitemie [4], Ikiomoworio Nicholas Dienagha [5]

[1] Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd, Nigeria
[2] Shell Nigeria Gas (SEN/ SNG), Nigeria
[3] TotalEnergies Exploration & Production Nigeria Limited, Nigeria
[4] Shell Energy Nigeria PLC, Nigeria
[5] Shell Petroleum Development Company, Lagos Nigeria, Nigeria

* Corresponding Author: **Magnus Okechukwu Kanu**

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Abstract
This paper explores the low-carbon transition of Greenfield gas projects in emerging energy markets, emphasizing their critical role in bridging the gap between traditional and renewable energy systems. The theoretical framework highlights principles such as decarbonization and establishing sustainable energy systems. Key strategies are outlined, including the adoption of advanced technologies like carbon capture and hydrogen integration, supportive policy and regulatory frameworks, and innovative economic incentives. Challenges such as technical gaps, financial constraints, and weak governance are discussed alongside opportunities for innovation, market growth, and international collaboration. The findings underscore stakeholder coordination's importance in addressing these challenges and leveraging opportunities, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, and investors. By integrating sustainability into project designs and operations, Greenfield gas projects can support energy access, economic development, and global climate goals, positioning emerging markets as leaders in the energy transition.

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1. Introduction
The global energy landscape is at a crossroads, driven by an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while meeting the growing energy demands of emerging economies (Han, Meas, & an, 2021). Greenfield gas projects—those developed from scratch without existing infrastructure—are increasingly positioned as a critical component in the transition to a sustainable energy future (Shortall, Davidsdottir, & Axelsson, 2015). Natural gas is widely regarded as a cleaner alternative to coal and oil, so these projects are often considered a bridge fuel to more sustainable energy sources. However, the benefits of these initiatives depend on their alignment with low-carbon strategies (Roosa, 2020).

Low-carbon transitions are integral to achieving the goals outlined in international agreements like the Paris Accord, which aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C. The inclusion of natural gas in this framework reflects its potential to support the energy transition through lower emissions when compared to traditional fossil fuels (Iacobuţă, Höhne, van Soest, & Leemans, 2021). This potential is amplified in Greenfield contexts, where modern technologies and design principles can be integrated to minimize carbon footprints from the outset. The emphasis on sustainable development in these projects also addresses the dual challenge of energy access and environmental protection, which is particularly acute in emerging energy markets

(Höhne *et al.*, 2017). Emerging energy markets face distinct challenges in adopting low-carbon models for Greenfield gas projects. Limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a reliance on traditional energy systems often hinder the rapid adoption of sustainable Mishra (2005) argued that the degree of motivation among practices (Emodi, Wade, Rekker, & Greig, 2022). Additionally, these regions' geopolitical and regulatory complexities may delay or complicate the implementation of international environmental standards. Nevertheless, these challenges present opportunities to leapfrog traditional development models and adopt innovative solutions that align with global low-carbon goals (Stern, 2017).

This paper examines the critical components of low-carbon transition models for Greenfield gas projects in emerging energy markets. It explores the principles guiding such transitions, strategic pathways, challenges, and the opportunities that can drive meaningful change. The ultimate aim is to provide actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, and other stakeholders committed to fostering sustainable energy systems in rapidly evolving markets.

2. Theoretical Framework: Principles of low-carbon transition

2.1 Overview of low-carbon development principles

Low-carbon development revolves around systematically reducing greenhouse gas emissions in all sectors, particularly energy production and consumption. This transition involves shifting reliance from high-emission fuels like coal and oil to cleaner alternatives. Energy projects also entail adopting technologies and practices that minimize environmental impact without compromising economic feasibility (Stern, 2017).

Key components of low-carbon development include energy efficiency, emissions reduction, renewable energy integration, and circular economy approaches. Energy efficiency focuses on optimizing processes to maximize output per unit of input, thereby reducing waste (Klemeš, Varbanov, Walmsley, & Foley, 2019). Emissions reduction involves technologies like carbon capture and storage to curb pollutant release. Renewable energy integration emphasizes the gradual adoption of solar, wind, and hydropower, ensuring these sources complement and eventually replace fossil fuels. Circular economy principles reduce resource use, recycle waste, and promote sustainability throughout a project's lifecycle (Farret & Simões, 2017).

These elements align with global sustainability objectives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, which call for accessible, reliable, and sustainable energy for all. By adhering to these principles, energy projects can contribute to economic growth while supporting environmental stewardship.

2.2 Relevance to Greenfield gas projects in emerging energy markets

For Greenfield gas projects, applying low-carbon principles offers numerous advantages, particularly in emerging energy markets. These projects present a unique opportunity to design infrastructure and systems from scratch, unburdened by outdated technologies. This clean slate allows stakeholders to integrate modern, efficient, and sustainable practices from the beginning (Jones, 2017).

Natural gas is a transitional fuel due to its lower emissions than coal and oil. For emerging markets, its adoption offers a practical route toward decarbonization while addressing immediate energy demands. To maximize this potential, deliberate planning and execution are essential, with a focus on (Safari, Das, Langhelle, Roy, & Assadi, 2019):

- Developing facilities equipped with advanced technologies that reduce emissions.
- Utilizing gas to provide affordable energy to underserved populations, driving economic growth.
- Leveraging gas exports to strengthen economic resilience, particularly in resource-abundant regions.

However, challenges such as financial limitations, policy ambiguities, and technical skill gaps remain prevalent. Addressing these through innovative financing, capacity-building initiatives, and global partnerships is vital for aligning Greenfield projects with low-carbon objectives (Mathur *et al.*, 2022).

2.3 Key Concepts: Decarbonization and sustainable energy systems

Two fundamental concepts underpin the low-carbon transition: decarbonization and sustainable energy systems. Decarbonization involves systematically reducing carbon emissions across an energy system. In Greenfield gas projects, this means adopting practices like carbon capture and methane leak mitigation, alongside technologies that improve operational efficiency. These efforts advance climate goals and position projects to meet international regulatory standards and attract environmentally conscious investors (Mikulčić *et al.*, 2019).

Sustainable Energy Systems aim to establish energy infrastructure that is resilient, adaptive, and capable of meeting present needs without compromising future generations. For Greenfield projects, sustainability can be achieved by (Selim, Yousef, & Hagag, 2018):

- Designing flexible infrastructure that can integrate renewable energy over time.
- Promoting local benefits, including job creation, enhanced energy access, and economic growth.
- Minimizing environmental disruptions through eco-friendly practices during project development and operations.

By incorporating these concepts, Greenfield gas projects can play a transformative role in advancing both environmental and economic objectives in emerging markets.

In conclusion, low-carbon development principles offer a comprehensive theoretical framework for guiding Greenfield gas projects. These principles emphasize decarbonization and creating sustainable energy systems, ensuring economic viability while safeguarding the environment. Emerging energy markets have the opportunity to leverage these principles to establish new paradigms for energy development, setting the stage for a sustainable global energy transition.

3. Key Strategies for transitioning Greenfield gas projects

3.1 Technology adoption for emission reduction

Technological innovation is central to the success of any low-carbon transition. For Greenfield gas projects, the adoption of advanced technologies is instrumental in achieving significant emissions reductions and enhancing operational efficiency. These technologies help align projects with environmental goals and improve economic performance by optimizing resource use and lowering long-term costs (Botta, 2019).

One of the most impactful technologies is Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS). CCS systems capture carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions at the source and store them securely in geological formations, preventing their release into the atmosphere. CCS can be integrated directly into processing facilities, power plants, and other infrastructure for Greenfield gas projects. This approach is particularly effective in reducing emissions during natural gas combustion and processing, making it a vital tool for mitigating environmental impact while maintaining energy production capabilities (Raza, Gholami, Rezaee, Rasouli, & Rabiei, 2019).

Hydrogen integration represents another key innovation. Natural gas can act as a feedstock for hydrogen production, offering a clean energy alternative when used in fuel cells or other applications (Ishaq, Dincer, & Crawford, 2022). "Blue hydrogen," produced by reforming natural gas and capturing the associated CO_2, serves as an intermediate solution that bridges the gap to a renewable-driven future dominated by "green hydrogen." By strategically co-locating hydrogen production facilities with natural gas infrastructure, Greenfield projects can reduce emissions while optimizing resource use and creating pathways for sustainable energy systems (Khan *et al*., 2021).

Methane leak detection and mitigation are equally critical, given methane's potency as a greenhouse gas. Advanced monitoring systems, including satellite imaging and infrared sensors, enable quick and accurate detection of leaks across extraction, processing, and transportation activities. Combined with automated repair technologies, these systems minimize emissions, safeguarding environmental performance and enhancing operational safety (Kiriliuk, 2021).

Lastly, efficient gas turbines and combined heat and power systems significantly advance low-carbon objectives. These technologies increase energy conversion efficiency, reducing fuel consumption and associated emissions. High-efficiency turbines are particularly effective in power generation and industrial applications, while combined heat and power systems maximize resource utilization by simultaneously generating electricity and useful thermal energy. These innovations drive Greenfield gas projects toward sustainability, aligning them with broader climate and energy goals (Chu *et al*., 2022).

3.2 Policy and regulatory frameworks supporting green transitions

A robust policy framework is crucial for advancing the low-carbon transition of Greenfield gas projects. Governments and regulatory bodies play an instrumental role in shaping the trajectory of sustainable energy development by implementing policies that promote innovation, attract investment, and enforce adherence to environmental standards. Effective regulations not only guide the actions of project developers but also create an environment conducive to long-term sustainability (Botta, 2019).

Clear and enforceable emission standards compel developers to adopt cleaner technologies and practices. Governments ensure that Greenfield gas projects align with global environmental objectives by setting stringent limits on greenhouse gas emissions. These standards should be harmonized with international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, to enhance consistency and accountability across borders. Developers are thus incentivized to integrate advanced emission-reduction technologies from the outset (Botta, 2019).

Carbon pricing mechanisms, such as taxes or cap-and-trade systems, are another critical policy tool. By assigning a cost to carbon emissions, these mechanisms encourage companies to minimize their environmental impac (Stavins, 2022) t. Carbon pricing creates a direct economic incentive for Greenfield gas projects to invest in low-carbon technologies and improve operational efficiency. The financial implications of carbon pricing drive innovation and make sustainable practices a priority for developers seeking to optimize project viability (Stavins, 2019).

Permitting and approval processes that favor low-carbon designs further support the transition. By streamlining approvals for projects incorporating sustainable features, regulatory bodies clearly communicate the importance of prioritizing environmentally friendly approaches. Incentives like expedited permitting timelines or reduced fees for projects with low-carbon components make compliance more attractive to developers, encouraging them to integrate sustainability into their plans (Peterson, Stephens, & Wilson, 2015).

Policies that support the integration of renewable energy into gas projects play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between traditional and future energy systems. For instance, mandates for renewable portfolio standards or incentives for hybrid energy designs enable natural gas infrastructure to incorporate renewable sources like solar or wind. This integration reduces emissions and ensures the long-term relevance of gas infrastructure in a decarbonizing energy landscape (Abdmouleh, Alammari, & Gastli, 2015). By implementing and enforcing these policy measures, governments can drive the low-carbon transition of Greenfield gas projects. A well-structured policy environment aligns economic and environmental goals, creating pathways for innovation and sustainability in the energy sector.

3.3 Economic incentives and financing for sustainable energy projects

Economic factors play a decisive role in determining the viability of low-carbon transitions, particularly in emerging markets where resource constraints often challenge the adoption of sustainable practices. By leveraging innovative financing models and economic incentives, Greenfield gas projects can embrace low-carbon solutions without compromising their financial performance or long-term profitability (Qadir, Al-Motairi, Tahir, & Al-Fagih, 2021).

Government subsidies and grants are among the most effective tools for reducing the upfront costs associated with low-carbon technologies like CCS and hydrogen production. These direct financial aids make it easier for developers to incorporate advanced systems that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive (Reigstad *et al*., 2022). Subsidies can also alleviate ongoing operational costs, ensuring that sustainable practices remain viable over the lifecycle of a project. Such financial support is particularly crucial in regions with limited capital access, helping to level the playing field for Greenfield initiatives (Bielenberg, Kerlin, Oppenheim, & Roberts, 2016).

Green bonds and climate financing offer additional avenues for securing funding dedicated to environmentally friendly projects. Green bonds allow developers to raise capital specifically tied to low-carbon objectives, attracting investors who prioritize sustainability in their portfolios. International climate financing mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund, are vital in supporting project development in under-resourced areas. By aligning funding opportunities with sustainability goals, these mechanisms enable Greenfield gas projects to overcome financial barriers and achieve meaningful environmental outcomes (Rossitto, 2021).

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are another powerful strategy for facilitating low-carbon transitions. By fostering collaborations between governments and private sector entities, PPPs pool resources, share risks, and accelerate the deployment of innovative solutions (Gardiner, Bardout, Grossi, & Dixson-Declève, 2015). Governments can provide regulatory support and initial funding, while private partners contribute technical expertise, advanced technology, and additional capital. These partnerships enable comprehensive approaches to sustainability that might be unattainable for individual stakeholders operating in isolation.

Tax incentives and accelerated depreciation benefits further enhance the financial attractiveness of low-carbon investments. Tax credits for technologies like CCS and advanced gas turbines reduce the overall financial burden on developers, making it easier to justify the adoption of capital-intensive systems. Accelerated depreciation schemes allow companies to recover investments more quickly, improving cash flow and incentivizing the incorporation of sustainable technologies into project designs (Anderson, Rode, Zhai, & Fischbeck, 2022).

Revenue-sharing mechanisms with local communities are essential for fostering social acceptance and ensuring that the benefits of Greenfield gas projects extend beyond corporate profits. These mechanisms allocate a portion of project revenues to support local development initiatives, such as education, healthcare, or infrastructure improvements (Cohen-Rosenthal & Musnikow, 2017). By directly involving communities in the economic gains, such models build trust and create a sense of shared ownership, which is critical for the long-term success and sustainability of the projects (Vanclay, Esteves, Aucamp, & Franks, 2015). By adopting these economic strategies, Greenfield gas projects can effectively navigate the financial complexities of low-carbon transitions. These approaches mitigate the cost barriers associated with sustainable practices and align stakeholder interests, creating pathways for inclusive, environmentally responsible, and economically viable energy development.

4. Challenges and opportunities in emerging energy markets

4.1 Technical, economic, and regulatory hurdles

4.1.1 Technical Hurdles

Emerging markets often grapple with technological gaps that hinder the adoption of advanced, low-carbon solutions. The expertise and infrastructure required for technologies like carbon capture, storage systems, or hydrogen integration are either limited or nonexistent in many regions. Additionally, the lack of skilled labor and technical knowledge exacerbates these challenges, delaying the deployment of cutting-edge solutions in Greenfield gas projects (Sovacool, Newell, Carley, & Fanzo, 2022).

Another key issue is the aging or inadequate infrastructure that is often unable to support modern energy systems. For example, integrating natural gas pipelines with renewable energy technologies or deploying advanced monitoring systems for methane emissions requires significant technical upgrades that may be unaffordable or logistically complex in these regions (Iweh, Gyamfi, Tanyi, & Effah-Donyina, 2021).

4.1.2 Economic Hurdles

The financial constraints in emerging markets pose a substantial barrier to low-carbon transitions. Developing Greenfield gas projects with integrated sustainable technologies often entails high upfront costs, which can be prohibitive for resource-strapped economies. High interest rates, perceived investment risks, and limited credit availability hinder financing access (Bose *et al*., 2019). Economic dependency on fossil fuel exports in some regions can also slow the adoption of low-carbon strategies. Policymakers may resist transitioning to sustainable practices due to concerns about revenue loss and the associated socioeconomic impacts, including job displacement in traditional energy sectors (Cordonnier & Saygin, 2022).

4.1.3 Regulatory Hurdles

Weak or inconsistent regulatory frameworks in many emerging markets create additional challenges. Without clear policies and enforcement mechanisms, developers face uncertainties that deter investment in sustainable energy projects. For example, the absence of stringent emission standards or well-defined carbon pricing systems can undermine the incentive to adopt cleaner technologies. Furthermore, bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption in certain regions can delay project approvals and create barriers to innovation. Streamlined regulatory processes and transparent governance are essential for enabling the low-carbon transition in these markets (Rudnick & Velasquez, 2018).

4.2 Potential for innovation and market growth

Despite the hurdles, emerging energy markets have immense potential to drive innovation and market expansion. Their unique characteristics—such as the absence of entrenched fossil fuel infrastructure and growing energy demand—make them ideal candidates for leapfrogging traditional energy development models.

Greenfield gas projects in emerging markets offer a clean slate to integrate low-carbon technologies from the outset. For instance, these projects can be designed with renewable energy compatibility, allowing for a seamless transition to hybrid or fully renewable systems. Innovations like modular gas processing units or small-scale liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants are also being explored to make projects more adaptable and cost-effective (Brown & Stigge, 2017). Moreover, using digital technologies and automation in gas projects can improve efficiency and reduce emissions. Advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, and Internet of Things (IoT) solutions can optimize operations, monitor environmental performance, and enable predictive maintenance, reducing downtime and costs (Tien, 2017).

The demand for cleaner energy in emerging markets is expected to rise significantly, driven by urbanization, industrialization, and efforts to expand energy access. With its relatively lower emissions profile, natural gas is well-positioned to meet this demand while contributing to climate goals (Fang, Gozgor, Mahalik, Mallick, & Padhan, 2022). Additionally, the global push for decarbonization is creating new markets for low-carbon products and services, such as hydrogen derived from natural gas. Export opportunities also exist for emerging markets with abundant natural gas resources. Developing Greenfield projects that adhere to international sustainability standards can make these regions competitive players in the global energy trade, particularly in markets seeking cleaner energy imports (Emodi *et al*., 2022).

4.3 Role of international collaboration and investments

International partnerships and investments are critical for overcoming challenges and unlocking opportunities in emerging energy markets. Collaboration between governments, private sector entities, and international organizations can provide the technical expertise, financial resources, and policy guidance needed to drive low-carbon transitions (Sen & Ganguly, 2017). Developed nations and multinational corporations can facilitate technology transfer to emerging markets, enabling access to advanced emission-reduction solutions. This collaboration can include training programs, technical support, and joint ventures to build local capacity and expertise.

International financial institutions, such as the World Bank and regional development banks, are crucial in providing funding for sustainable energy projects. Green climate funds, concessional loans, and grants can help reduce the financial burden on emerging markets, making low-carbon transitions more feasible. Collaborative initiatives, such as the Clean Energy Ministerial or the Global Methane Pledge, bring together governments and industry leaders to share knowledge, set ambitious targets, and mobilize resources for the energy transition. Participation in such initiatives can amplify the impact of Greenfield gas projects in emerging markets (Zhang, 2022).

While emerging energy markets face substantial technical, economic, and regulatory challenges, they also have significant opportunities to innovate and grow. The transition of Greenfield gas projects to low-carbon models is necessary for climate goals and offers a pathway to sustainable economic development (Bose *et al*., 2019). By leveraging technology, fostering innovation, and building international partnerships, these markets can overcome barriers and become leaders in the global energy transition. Ultimately, the interplay between challenges and opportunities underscores the need for a coordinated effort among stakeholders. Governments, private developers, international organizations, and local communities must collaborate to create an enabling environment for sustainable energy development, ensuring that Greenfield gas projects contribute meaningfully to a low-carbon future.

5. Conclusion

The transition of Greenfield gas projects in emerging markets toward low-carbon models is vital in addressing global sustainability challenges. These markets can meet immediate energy needs by leveraging natural gas as a transitional energy source while advancing long-term decarbonization goals. This paper has explored the principles, strategies, and challenges underpinning this shift, emphasizing the role of supportive policies, innovative financing, and advanced technologies in enabling sustainable energy transitions. These insights underscore the importance of a collective effort to balance economic development with environmental responsibility.

Emerging energy markets possess unique opportunities to redefine their energy pathways due to the relative lack of entrenched fossil fuel systems. When aligned with low-carbon principles, Greenfield gas projects can integrate cutting-edge technologies such as carbon capture, hydrogen production, and methane mitigation to achieve significant emissions reductions. Supportive policies and innovative financing mechanisms, such as green bonds and public-private partnerships, are critical to ensuring the viability of these initiatives. However, technical challenges, financial constraints, and weak governance structures remain significant barriers that must be addressed to unlock the full potential of these projects.

The success of low-carbon transitions in Greenfield gas projects hinges on concerted action from policymakers, industry stakeholders, and investors. Policymakers must establish robust regulatory frameworks, promote technology transfer, and streamline permitting processes to foster a conducive environment for sustainable practices. Industry leaders should prioritize technological innovation, engage local communities, and adopt integrated energy models that incorporate renewable sources. Meanwhile, investors play a pivotal role by prioritizing green financing, supporting early-stage projects, and demanding transparency through rigorous ESG reporting. Together, these efforts can ensure that Greenfield gas projects contribute meaningfully to global emissions reduction and sustainable development.

Greenfield gas projects in emerging markets can become cornerstones of the global energy transition by addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities outlined. These projects offer a pathway to reducing emissions while supporting local economic growth and improving energy access. The stakes are high, but with coordinated action and a commitment to sustainability, stakeholders can turn these challenges into opportunities for a more resilient, low-carbon future.

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