



Inside Independent Power Producers:  
**Social performance perspectives from REIPPPP**

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LIES AT THE HEART OF THE SOCIAL LICENCE

## How well are companies prepared for the task at hand?

In South Africa, renewable energy (RE) projects are implemented in a context of stark race and gender inequities, as well as high poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

Here, the responsibility for company-community relations is commonly in the hands of Economic Development (ED) managers and their teams, often including Community Liaison Officers (CLOs).

Working at the interface between company and community, these practitioners occupy a complex position. This research finds that companies need to attend to internal factors in order to improve their social performance.

## TENTRANS RESEARCH PROJECT

**Duration:** April 2018 to December 2020

**Funder:** Research grant from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Aim:** Study the lessons learnt in the implementation of REIPPPP to generate new knowledge in support of the further deployment of sustainable wind energy schemes.

**Process:** The research examines how project developers, investors, local industries, local governments, and communities experience the benefits and challenges of REIPPPP.

### Research areas:

1. Procurement design and price
2. Community engagement
3. Local content and manufacturing

For more info, visit our project [webpage](#).

## WHO ARE REIPPPP'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS?

**ED practitioners are challenged to perform in the absence of standards, policies, and procedures guiding them on how to practise**

### OVERALL DEMOGRAPHICS & BACKGROUNDS OF ED PRACTITIONERS

- Approximately 45 professionals employed in RE companies (excluding CLOs)
- Diverse disciplinary tertiary education & professional backgrounds
- Majority are black women

### ASPIRATIONS & IDEALS

- Diverse perceptions of the private sector, but a positive view on the role of business in development is shared across the board.
- Community development is a key motivation for working in renewable energy.



# WHAT WE KNOW FROM EXISTING RESEARCH

## Effective community engagement work requires resources

### Company internal and external factors for success

**External** factors\* evolve around the influence, legitimacy, and interactions of practitioners outside the organisation, i.e. their relationships with other actors such as the communities themselves, local and central government, and other corporate actors.

The less explored **internal** dimensions also strongly affect the position and practices of practitioners. These include:

- Their access to resources within the company, notably financial and human resources.
- The formal organisational basis for their work, including their hierarchical position in the company vis-à-vis organisational strategies and decision-making.
- Their informal influence and networks in the company.

In corporate settings, community engagement work may be perceived as a marginal activity by the leadership, to which limited resources and significance is attached.



\*As defined by Owen & Kemp 2014; read the [full paper here](#)



# TENTRANS RESEARCH FINDINGS

ED practitioners face specific dilemmas within companies. Three examples are presented here.

Practitioners can make use of their **personal agency** within the company to develop and **maintain** practices, or to **disrupt** and **change** them.

**1**

DILEMMA	VS	STRATEGIES
<p><b>How to pursue personal ideals in a corporate context?</b></p> <p><b>Practitioners:</b> Strong ideals regarding community development &amp; 'making a difference'</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Building personal ideals into community engagement practice</b> Paying particular attention to marginalised groups in engagement work</li><li>• <b>Exercising internal advocacy</b> Advocating for progressive approaches to the board through narratives that <b>combine</b> 'bottom line' rationales with disguised personal ideals</li></ul>

"It took a few years of convincing the board, but now I have their full support to implement preferential procurement from black women-owned businesses across all our community investment spend."  
- ED practitioner

**2**

DILEMMA	VS	STRATEGIES
<p><b>How to make a difference from a marginalised position?</b></p> <p>In a society like South Africa, patriarchal and racist power dynamics are entrenched. Here, race and gender intersectionalities further marginalise ED practitioners, who are often black and female, within companies.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mobilising the interface position</b> Using experience-based knowledge from the field about 'how communities work'</li><li>• <b>Developing strategic relationships</b> Forming good working relationships with CEOs and other leaders who are positive about community engagement</li></ul>

"I had three ceos. I could tell the difference between one who does not understand vs one who does understand. We could then move budgets, with understanding. It could boil down to personal values and relationships."  
- ED practitioner

**3**

DILEMMA	VS	STRATEGIES
<p><b>How to deliver results without practice frameworks?</b></p> <p>The renewable energy sector is at the beginning of a journey towards social performance maturity. Most companies are only starting to formalise policies and practices.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Piecing together practices</b> Mixing well-established NGO practices with formal (corporate) performance requirements</li><li>• <b>Formalising informal practices</b> Building flexible company strategies, guidelines or other written statements that set out the company's approach to community engagement</li></ul>

"As an ED manager, you have to have the right principles and want to do community development. But you also need to be able to act fast and smart."  
- ED practitioner

# RECOMMENDATIONS


## What support is needed?

- Develop and formalise the emerging practice frameworks for community engagement/social performance/community development.
- Ensure these frameworks are meaningfully shaped by practitioners' grounded experiences and ideals.
- Shift initial corporate approaches towards more inclusive and collaborative approaches (e.g. asset-based community development (ABCD), IPPs' collaboration efforts).
- Contextualise this new practice field and link it to historical experiences and current debates (e.g. on trauma, internalised systems of privilege, racism).
- Support the emerging community of practice in which practitioners engage, reflect, and critique the state of affairs in the field.

[READ MORE ABOUT REIPPPP](#)

[READ MORE ABOUT TENTRANS](#)

"How we engage determines how engaged communities are with their own development process and the opportunities associated with the industry."  
- ED practitioner



PRACTICE NOTE  
**COMMITTING TO  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

LEARNING EVENT INSIGHTS  
DEEPENING REIPPPP'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

In partnership with:  
USAID synergy ForethoughtAfrica jade-sky energydesk

Supporters:  
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This research project examines how South Africa's Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme interacts with local industrial development and local institutional change. It is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

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