

# Beyond Bid Windows:

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES OF  
RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS  
ON COMMUNAL LAND IN SA



# Introduction

South Africa's Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), launched in 2011, has been widely celebrated as a policy success story—attracting substantial private investment while advancing the country's renewable energy transition and socioeconomic transformation objectives.<sup>1</sup> Central to the programme's design are community benefit provisions requiring that renewable energy projects deliver tangible economic returns to nearby communities, particularly those historically marginalised under apartheid.<sup>2</sup>

The Wesley-Ciskei Windfarm located in Nyulutsi in the Eastern Cape and the Tsitsikamma Community Windfarm located in Wittekleibosch in the same province represent unique case studies within this framework. They are two of a few REIPPPP projects fully implemented on rural black-owned land, theoretically positioning the host communities not merely as passive beneficiaries but as active stakeholders with direct land rights.

The REIPPPP requires interested bidders to prepare and submit bid submissions in response to its request for proposals (RFP) within specified timelines. In terms of the RFP, a bid window is opened through which prospective IPPs propose projects that are evaluated in terms of selected requirements. The requirements vary and are determined as per the particular bid window open. The Wesley-Ciskei Wind Farm operates under bid window 4 while the Tsitsikamma Community Wind Farm operates under bid window 2. These projects provide insights into how theoretical policy requirements translate into real-world outcomes for community members, particularly the complexities and imperfections. For many, these projects could potentially be seen as models for how renewable energy development can catalyse inclusive rural transformation, creating pathways for communities to participate meaningfully in South Africa's green economy transition.

Yet, beneath the policy optimism lies a more complex and sometimes troubling experiences. This study explores the lived experiences of communities hosting these pioneering wind energy projects. Their stories reveal deep gaps between the promises made in policy and the lived reality on the ground.

Community members describe a process marked by systematic patterns of information asymmetry, structural inequality, and broken promises that characterise community-IPP relationships. Instead of the partnership they envisioned, community members tell of decisions made without clear communication, benefits that shifted or failed to materialise, and a steady erosion of trust as promises remain unfulfilled. Even where intention may have not been exploitative, the outcome – shaped by the perceived challenges – has left many feeling sidelined in developments taking place in their own backyard.

This case study brings these experiences into focus. It follows the perspectives of the Nyulutsi and Wittekleibosch communities as they reflect on the arrival of the wind farms, the agreements they entered into, and the consequences – positive and challenging – that followed. What emerges from this is not a rejection of renewable energy, private investment, nor of development itself. Instead, it is a call to examine how projects on communal land are negotiated, how community interests are represented, and how commitments are monitored. These lessons matter not only for these two communities, but for the future of community-centred renewable energy development in South Africa.

1 BDO South Africa

2 Müller, F. & Claar, S. (2021) *Auctioning a 'just energy transition'? South Africa's renewable energy procurement programme*. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48654595>



# How the projects began, and why land history mattered



Wesley-Ciskei Windfarm | Image Credit: southafrica.edf-powersolution.com

## Context: Communities and IPPs

Both projects followed similar initiation pathways with community members who had relocated to urban areas encountering IPP developers. These individuals – caught between rural belonging and urban exposure – soon became intermediaries who brought IPP development interest back to their communities.

The developers then convened community meetings to present proposed projects and outline operational frameworks under which the developments might proceed. Those first meetings shaped everything that followed, because they set expectations about trust, benefits and decision-making metrics.

One developer reflected that these early engagements were also shaped by uncertainty at the bid stage. He explained that because projects still needed to win a bid window, developers had to manage community hopes and expectations carefully and be clear that the project might not be approved. From this perspective, when that uncertainty is not explained repeatedly, early expectations can solidify into promises in people's minds, which later fuels disappointment even when changes are policy-driven rather than intentional.

To understand these engagements, it is necessary to examine the contexts of the rural communities in which these discussions took place. From the onset, these contexts shaped every discussion that followed.

they struggled to obtain title deeds during their engagements with developers, describing how they were given the runaround by government offices and were unable to secure assistance:

*"It was just a matter of not knowing where the title deeds were. For instance, our parents tried to obtain title deeds and they never succeeded until they passed away. They were referred to all these surrounding towns like we were. One time you are referred to Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown), another time to East London, and vice versa. This also happened to us, until the IPP paid lawyers to help us acquire these title deeds as they could not start the project without them. Our history with the land is like that."*

## Land History

While most wind projects in the country are built on White-owned commercial land, the Wesley-Ciskei Windfarm is grounded in a different land story. In Nyulutsi, the land comprises of eleven properties owned by twelve black families. They explained that their forefathers purchased this land, which has passed down through generations via inheritance. Notably, these families were never dispossessed of their land during the apartheid regime. However,

Developers confirmed that Nyulutsi's land ownership structure was unusually complex for a wind project. They explained that many title records were still in ancestors' names, and heirs were scattered across the country or abroad. Before leases could be finalised, the developer team funded legal work to trace descendants and formalise succession through a High Court process. They described this as slow and detailed, but necessary for legal certainty and to secure project finance.

The Tsitsikamma Community Windfarm is located in the Wittekleibosch community in Tsitsikamma. Wittekleibosch residents explained that Tsitsikamma belongs to *amaMfengu* and it comprises four distinct communities, of which Wittekleibosch is one. However, when the title deed was issued, it recognized Tsitsikamma as a single entity. Consequently, all four communities share a single collective title deed. As discussed later, this arrangement created complications. Although the windfarm is located exclusively within Wittekleibosch, consultations and benefit sharing required the involvement of all four communities - a situation that frustrated Wittekleibosch residents.

The context in Tsitsikamma is further complicated by a painful history of land dispossession. Under apartheid, residents were forcibly removed from their land in 1977, with restitution only occurring in 1994 following the democratic transition. Participants recounted being relocated to Qoboqobo (formerly Keiskammahoek), a town that is over six hundred kilometres away from their dispossessed land.

Upon their eventual return, they were not restored to their original plots. Instead, they received smaller parcels in a township-style layout rather than the rural agricultural land they had previously farmed for subsistence.

The Tsitsikamma developer emphasised that this land history shaped engagement in lasting ways. He described restitution communities as carrying both hope and caution into new development projects and said that acknowledging dispossession and return openly in meetings was essential for building trust in the present.

The two communities entered these projects from very different land histories, and those histories continue to shape how people understand fairness, ownership, and equity.



Tsitsikamma Community Windfarm | Image Credit: cennergi.com

## The language and power asymmetries

From the early stages of negotiation, community members in both Nyulutsi and Wittekleibosch sensed that they and the IPPs were working from different starting points. Residents described entering discussions with expectations shaped by rural life, communal or inherited land systems, and everyday ways of making decisions.

The IPPs, on the other hand, operated within formal business and legal processes, as required by the programme. In practice, community members experienced this difference as a gap in familiarity and confidence: they often felt they were being asked to participate in a system that was new to them, using rules and language they had not been prepared for.

One of the clearest examples residents raised was the requirement to provide title deeds before projects could move forward. Community members understood that this was a necessary step under both the REIPPPP rules and the developers' processes. At the same time, they explained that producing title deeds was not simple in their context. In Nyulutsi, families had long struggled to access or formalise documents even though they had owned the land for generations. In Tsitsikamma, the legacy of dispossession and restitution, alongside collective ownership across four communities, made formal documentation difficult to navigate. From the community viewpoint, the challenge was less about the requirement itself and more about how hard it was to meet it without guidance on how to go about it that spoke to their land realities.

Developers agreed that this was one of the hardest early bridges to build. They described the bid and finance rules as requiring formal clarity about ownership and leases, even though communal and inherited land often works through living memory rather than paper registries. In their view, this mismatch is structural, and it means projects need extra legal and communication support in rural contexts from the outset.

Residents therefore stressed the importance of support alongside formal requirements. They felt that if communities are expected to comply with legal conditions, they need clear, practical explanations of what different ownership forms

mean, what rights or responsibilities come with them, and how these should be reflected in documents. Without that kind of help, people described feeling as though they were moving through technical steps without fully understanding the long-term implications for their land and livelihoods.

A similar feeling emerged around the language used in contracts and benefit discussions. Across both communities, residents repeatedly said that many business terms were unfamiliar or difficult to translate into local languages. Words such as "revenue" were mentioned as examples of concepts that did not easily connect to daily experience. Community members emphasised that this was not only a matter of vocabulary. It was also about the way financial ideas worked — how income would be calculated, how often it would be paid, and what share would realistically reach households. When these ideas were not clearly understood, people felt uncertain about what they had agreed to and what they could expect in return.

One developer described trying to reduce this gap by translating finance into everyday terms. He said that in community meetings they often broke earnings down into per-turbine figures and simple timelines, and left behind written or visual summaries so families could revisit the information later. From his perspective, this was important because trust depends on people being able to confirm for themselves what was discussed, not only on remembering what was said in a single meeting.

Community members framed this concern as an issue of mutual understanding. In their view, agreements work best when both sides share the same grasp of key terms and consequences. When one side is still learning the concepts, trust becomes harder to sustain, especially later when questions arise about payments or benefits. Residents' experiences therefore point to the need for intentional translation and capacity-building during negotiations, so that communities can engage with confidence and clarity.

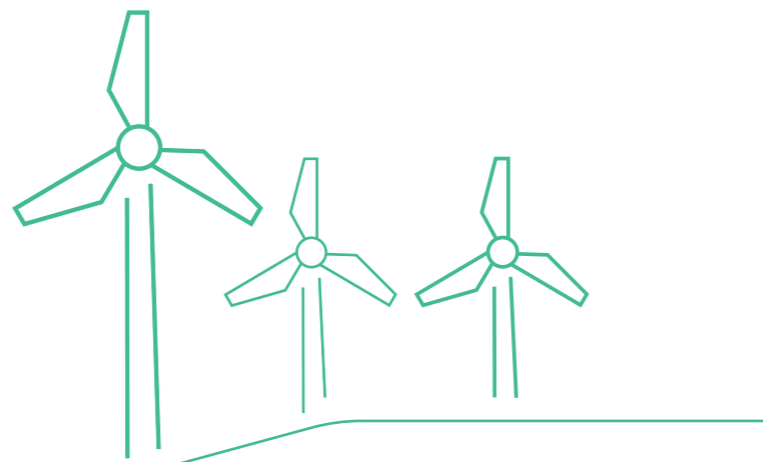
Developers also noted that misunderstandings grow when communities wait many years before seeing a direct dividend. In Tsitsikamma, for instance, the community share was financed through loans, meaning dividends could only be paid after repayment. The developer recalled explaining that dividends might realistically start flowing many years into operation, around year eight. He noted that if this delay is not explained repeatedly, it can easily feel to residents like withheld information or a broken promise.

Over time, these differences in language and process shaped how residents understood power in the relationship. Many felt that they were expected to adjust to formal corporate systems, while they themselves were still building familiarity with those systems. Importantly, residents did not describe this as something caused only by companies. They also noted that government programmes often require rural communities to adopt formal structures, such as community or family trusts, in order to participate. Communities recognised that these structures may be necessary for legal compliance and financing. Yet they also felt that such models arrived from outside their usual ways of organising and making collective decisions, and that they needed more support to make these models truly workable for local realities.

Developers similarly described community trusts as the main legal "vehicle" available under REIPPPP at the time. One developer reflected that while trusts enabled participation, they also came with governance risks if not designed in a way that communities fully understood. Looking back, he felt more time should have been spent helping communities map decision-making, reporting duties, and accountability structures before the trust began operating.

Another developer highlighted that bid and financing rules also shape ownership outcomes. Even in projects on black rural land, communities typically cannot bring large equity into bids. This means they enter as minority partners (often around 20–25%), not because of a choice against community ownership, but because corporate partners must hold most equity to secure finance.

Overall, community members' accounts suggest that the main challenge was not the presence of formal rules or business structures, but the way these were introduced into rural settings. From their perspective, better "bridging" approaches are needed — practical support systems that help communities, IPPs, and government meet one another halfway, share a clear understanding of terms, and build agreements that feel fair, transparent, and grounded in local context.



# Land Reclassification and Emerging Impacts

Another example illustrating the consequences of limited understanding of urban terminology and its conceptual implications can be seen in a common complaint among residents. Residents reported receiving minimal assistance and support from the local government because their land has been categorised as private rather than communal land<sup>3</sup>, which is the typical designation for most rural communities in the Eastern Cape. This mattered because land classification affects municipal services, property rates, and which government structures are responsible for support.

Residents could not explain when or why this reclassification occurred. They did report, however, that when the renewable energy projects commenced, they were required to produce title deeds. Despite this requirement, they demonstrated limited understanding of what the contents of these title deeds stipulated.

In Wittekleibosch specifically, residents could not clarify whether the title deeds rendered the land private property under community trust ownership, or whether the land remained communal with the trust serving merely as an administrator. They showed little awareness of the potential implications of obtaining a title deed. They knew only that title deeds were required for the projects to proceed.

While Nyulutsi residents shared similar concerns about government neglect related to the private land categorization, their land had always been private property. Specifically, the land consists of eleven properties owned by of twelve families. However, it remained unclear to them whether this fact ought to have justified neglect by the government. Furthermore, they reported that their municipality's tendencies of keeping a close eye on them and changing land designations upon the wind farm project's arrival raised concerns. Notably, one family in Nyulutsi experienced their land being reclassified as commercial when a power station was placed on their land. Residents explained that this reclassification was never communicated to them or to the affected family members. In fact, they only became aware of it while pursuing unpaid land rental payments. During their dispute with the IPP over missing rental payments, the municipality informed the family that they owed higher rates than other families because their land was now classified as commercial. The aggrieved family complained that the concepts and implications involving the rental of their land were not explained to them. When they agreed to lease their land, they did not know that the municipality would reclassify it and such factors were not considered when the agreement was reached.

<sup>3</sup> Communal land refers to the former homeland regions in which people were moved due to the Homelands Act of the apartheid regime. This land is reported to encompass approximately 13% of South Africa, equivalent to around 18 million hectares, though only part of it consisted of arable land. When South Africa transitioned to democracy, government took ownership of this land, with management conducted through tribal authorities and local municipalities. This tenure arrangement is predominantly found in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The system typically grants residents a "permission to occupy", which lacks legal standing despite its widespread use in former homeland areas. Residents in these regions commonly describe this as "own land," though strictly speaking, it does not constitute private ownership.

Residents also expressed concerns about possible manipulation within the agreements and project operations. The handling of critical project matters—including substation placement, land reclassification, and revenue and rental payments—has led residents to worry not only about their limited understanding of business concepts but also about deliberate misinformation and exploitation by either the IPPs or the community trusts. Whether this happened through deliberate exploitation or through neglect in a confusing system, people experience it as deeply unfair.

Developers did not dispute that these consequences can feel sudden and unfair. One noted that municipal reclassification is often outside a project's direct control, but agreed that communities should be explicitly warned early on about possible rate and zoning changes tied to infrastructure placement. In their reflection, this kind of “hidden consequence” is where better up-front explanation could prevent later conflict.

Photo by Chris Yang on Unsplash

# Power Imbalances and Vulnerability

One Nyulutsi resident described their vulnerability, noting that a key challenge crippling community members is their lack of exposure [to urban ways of doing]. In her words, *"abantu bakuthi babomvu"* (loosely translating to “our people lack exposure”), and this lack of exposure makes them vulnerable to misinformation and susceptible to accepting whatever is offered without careful examination.

Community members recognised their limited capacity to engage effectively in technical negotiations. However, this awareness did not translate into empowerment, as communities lacked the financial resources to retain independent legal counsel or technical business advisors who could represent their interests. This created a significant power asymmetry. IPPs are well resourced, with teams of lawyers and other service providers, while communities negotiate without equivalent support. Residents report further that the government did not play a significant role in the negotiations.

One participant's testimony powerfully illustrates this predicament:

*"While we were discussing these things, we also invited business lawyers. We wanted them to listen to these discussions because we didn't know whether we would be deceived. We do not know business language. At times it is not translatable. You see what I'm telling you about revenue? You cannot translate that to be understood by most people in my community. And they make it worse by not providing a report of what that revenue is."*

Most invited lawyers declined because the community could not pay them. This showed the community's awareness of their vulnerability, their attempts to secure expertise, and the failure of IPPs to provide accessible financial reporting.

The result was clear in both sites: residents say they do not fully understand the benefit-sharing structures, especially what “payment in revenue” really means. They believe critical information

is being withheld, particularly about how much profit is made and how their share is calculated.

Nyulutsi participants indicated that they understand revenue-based payment as a percentage of profits, but their primary concern is the absence of financial documentation or information showing how much revenue was generated in any given period. They explained that they receive rental payments twice a year, yet before each payment, they have no visibility into either the expected amount or the underlying profits from which their share is calculated.

Similarly, Wittekleibosch residents described the same challenge, but payments arrive only once a year, which they say is too infrequent. They argued that basic fairness requires that residents be informed of what they are owed in advance of each payment period—either through fixed rental agreements or through clear financial reports. Residents further reported that the IPP makes payments to a community trust, which then distributes funds into different community initiatives. However, community members complained that the trust also fails to provide financial reports, leaving them uninformed about how much the trust receives from the IPP and how those funds are allocated.

The Tsitsikamma developer described trying to address this gap through shared governance and slow financial education. Community directors sat on the project board, and meetings were intentionally extended so statements could be worked through line-by-line, with space for questions. He believed this was necessary to prevent mistrust and rumours, and to make financial information more practically usable for local representatives.

# Socio-Economic Benefits

Beyond rental payments, both communities hoped the projects would bring real change – especially jobs for young people and support for local businesses. These hopes were part of early discussions with developers and matched what REIPPPP promises in principle. But when construction ended and operations began, many residents felt the benefits did not match what they believed had been agreed.

## Employment Expectations and Outcomes in Nyulutsi

In Nyulutsi, job creation formed a central component of early negotiations. Residents reported an agreement that community members would be prioritised during recruitment. However, they expressed profound disappointment with the outcomes. They reported that only a few jobs materialised, and many were filled by people from outside the area. One participant articulated this frustration:

*"And we have had conflicts, particularly regarding job creation. Remember I said that we reached an agreement that the youth of this community would get jobs from the implementation of this project? That did not happen. Up to this point, the youth of this community do not have jobs. Instead, we see people from other places coming to work here."*

Participants emphasised that even low-skill jobs such as cleaning and grounds maintenance (cutting grass) went to non-residents. They also reported no skills development support.

Residents further reported that jobs were never publicly advertised and that they only learned of vacancies when outsiders arrived to work. When residents raised these concerns,

IPP representatives said hiring was not their responsibility and referred residents to the municipality, leaving them feeling betrayed and confused about the legitimacy of their original agreement.

One developer reflected that employment is the area where expectations rise quickly but are hardest to sustain after construction. Wind farms create many jobs while being built, but only a small number once operations begin. He felt projects should explain this difference early and repeatedly, so communities are not left expecting long-term employment levels that the project structure cannot provide.



Photo by Chris Yang on Unsplash

# Employment Expectations and Outcomes in Wittekleibosch

Residents in Wittekleibosch expressed mixed sentiments. While acknowledging that outcomes have not fully met their expectations, they recognized concrete efforts by the IPP. Housing improvements were made, though materials and workmanship were criticised. In education, residents point to an ongoing tutoring programme where children receive after-school help with schoolwork. The community hall was renovated and furnished and now hosts tutoring sessions and meetings. The IPP also provides meals for children attending these programmes.

Wittekleibosch residents also report meaningful support for local entrepreneurship. They say the IPP bought equipment and materials for several community businesses, including catering and other small enterprises. At the same time, they question how well these initiatives are monitored. The IPP hired people to conduct business assessments, but beneficiaries say they did not receive clear feedback or see strong follow-through from these evaluations. Overall, residents recognise that the IPP has made real efforts, even if those efforts are uneven or not consistently supervised.

Where Wittekleibosch differs strongly from Nyulutsi is in how accountability is understood. Many Wittekleibosch residents direct their sharpest anger toward the community trust. They allege that trust leadership benefits itself, fails to report honestly, and does not represent community interests. In their view, the trust is a major reason benefits feel limited or unfair, even when the IPP is seen as at least trying to contribute.

The Tsitsikamma developer also described local enterprise support as part of a deliberate effort to turn project benefits into longer-term livelihood pathways. He said the intention was not only to fund businesses but to keep checking how they were progressing, even though residents later felt those monitoring visits were unclear or did not translate into visible follow-up.



# Dishonoured agreements and broken trust

Residents in Nyulutsi stressed a hard lesson for other communities: do not allow developers to begin construction or operation before meeting what was promised in agreements. People feel that once construction starts, community leverage weakens dramatically, and unfulfilled promises become difficult to enforce. This warning reflects their lived experience of repeated dishonouring of agreements.

The most painful Nyulutsi dispute involves the family whose land hosts the wind farm's substation. Residents report that the municipality reclassified this land as commercial after the station was built, and that this shift was not properly communicated. The family now pays higher commercial rates, yet receives no rental payments for hosting the power station. According to residents, the IPP argues that rental for this land should be the same as for surrounding farmland. The family rejects this because a power station is not the same land use as turbines on farmland, and because commercial rates should correspond to commercial-level rental.

Residents say the IPP has been reluctant to negotiate seriously. They believe protest and

blockade are the only ways to get attention. Although previous protests forced negotiations, residents say agreements reached afterward were still not honoured. This cycle has deepened mistrust and left the community feeling that credible communication and dispute-resolution structures are missing.

On the Tsitsikamma side, one developer noted that projects can also change between the preferred-bidder stage and financial close because of government or technical requirements. In Tsitsikamma, turbine positions shifted during this period. He said that without constant updates and careful documentation of each change, such shifts can easily be experienced as broken promises, even when they arise from compliance rather than intent.



Photo by Artem R on Unsplash

# Rethinking Benefit-Sharing: Grievances and Pathways for Future Development

Both communities raised strong objections to how benefits are shared under the REIPPPP rule requiring socio-economic development for communities within a 50-kilometer or district municipal radius. The fundamental grievance stems from residents' perception that the financial benefits they receive are already inadequate to meet their needs as directly affected communities. Consequently, they believe there is no justification for mandating that a portion of these 'insufficient' funds be shared with communities that are merely geographically proximate but not directly involved in the projects.

In Tsitsikamma, where four amaMfengu communities share one title deed, Wittekleibosch residents argue it is unfair for neighbouring communities to benefit equally from a wind farm located only in Wittekleibosch. They emphasise that only Wittekleibosch lives alongside the turbines and carries the daily burdens such as noise, stronger winds, and fear of future health impacts, while neighbouring communities carry none of these risks. They also believe each community should benefit primarily from developments within its own boundaries, rather than from another community's land through proximity alone.

In Nyulutsi, residents question why rental tied to privately owned Black land should be shared beyond host families, and they wonder whether similar dilution happens consistently for wind farms on White-owned private farms. Across both sites, the key point is that host benefits are already too small and sharing them further undermines any chance of meaningful development. Wittekleibosch residents illustrate this by noting that their annual land lease payout is roughly R6,000 (approximately USD377), which is absorbed by household necessities and leaves no surplus for saving, enterprise, or community investment.

Developers described this dilution as a product of the policy structure rather than a single local choice. One recalled that the original intention was to prioritise those directly connected to the land, but REIPPPP's radius rule and the

presence of non-resident heirs required multiple benefit channels: leases for landowners, dividends for residents on site, and a separate trust for nearby communities. He said that while the intention was inclusion, the outcome often feels like host communities must share benefits that are already limited.

These concerns about how benefits are distributed also shape how communities imagine future development. When residents were asked how relationships with IPPs could be improved, they began not with complaints but with a vision for the future. Across both sites, people emphasised that they want sustainable development, not short-term payouts. They spoke about businesses that can survive beyond the life of the turbines, reliable local jobs, and infrastructure that lasts. A repeated concern, especially in Nyulutsi, was that wind farms operate for about twenty years, while communities must build livelihoods that extend far beyond that period. They want wind projects to become foundations for independence rather than temporary income streams.

Developers echoed this long-term view. One described success as being measured not only in electricity delivered, but in whether communities look stronger and more economically independent a decade later. They emphasised the value of documenting the "before and after" of community life to judge whether projects genuinely shift livelihoods.

# Looking Ahead: Strengthening Community-centred Approaches

The experiences of Nyulutsi and Wittekleibosch show that renewable energy projects on communal land are never just about infrastructure and contracts; they are about land histories, trust, and whether development feels shared or imposed. These communities entered such projects with hope for jobs, reliable income, and lasting local development — and that hope has not disappeared. What has weakened, however, is confidence in how agreements are negotiated and carried through once projects are operational.

Across both sites, residents describe gaps between early expectations and later realities, particularly where communication thinned out, benefits became unclear, and payments remained too small and irregular to support meaningful planning. Developers' reflections suggest that some tensions stem from bid uncertainty, long delays before dividends flow, and policy-driven technical adjustments. Yet communities experience these same dynamics as exclusion when they are not explained consistently, transparently, and in accessible language.

Taken together, these cases point to a simple yet powerful lesson: the success of communal-land renewable energy projects rests on long-term partnerships, not once-off transactions. This requires recognising land histories from the outset; translating business and legal systems into everyday language; and designing trusts and benefit structures with communities rather than primarily for compliance. Crucially, it also requires consistent, reliable, and transparent communication, alongside ongoing relationship maintenance that is properly resourced and treated as core project work rather than an optional add-on.

Both landowners and developers may require structured support to engage effectively in such partnerships. Landowners often need independent capacity-building to strengthen their voices, build negotiating confidence, and navigate complex land agreements on more equal footing. Developers, too, benefit from skilled support in managing participatory processes and sustaining long-term relationships. A well-resourced and

trusted intermediary — such as civil society organisations or similar structures — could, in some cases, support both sides, provided its role is clearly defined and credible. Relationship-building and communication in these contexts require dedicated expertise and sustained investment.

Beyond formal benefit-sharing mechanisms, far greater attention is needed to unlocking community-led skills development and enterprise opportunities linked to renewable energy developments. Many of these remain underdeveloped, limiting the transformative potential of projects. At the same time, income streams must be transparent and predictable enough to support long-term planning and local development, rather than reinforcing uncertainty.

Without these shifts, renewable energy risks reproducing older patterns in which rural communities host national progress while remaining unsure of their own stake in it. With them, however, cases such as Nyulutsi and Wittekleibosch demonstrate that renewable energy can become not only a source of power, but a pathway toward dignity, economic independence, and justice-centred rural transformation.



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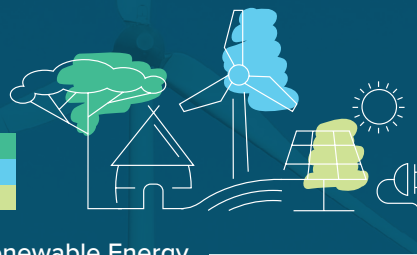


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