Enabling a Community-Powered Energy Transition:

Good practices for engaging stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and promoting socioeconomic benefits

March 2024

The Nature Conservancy

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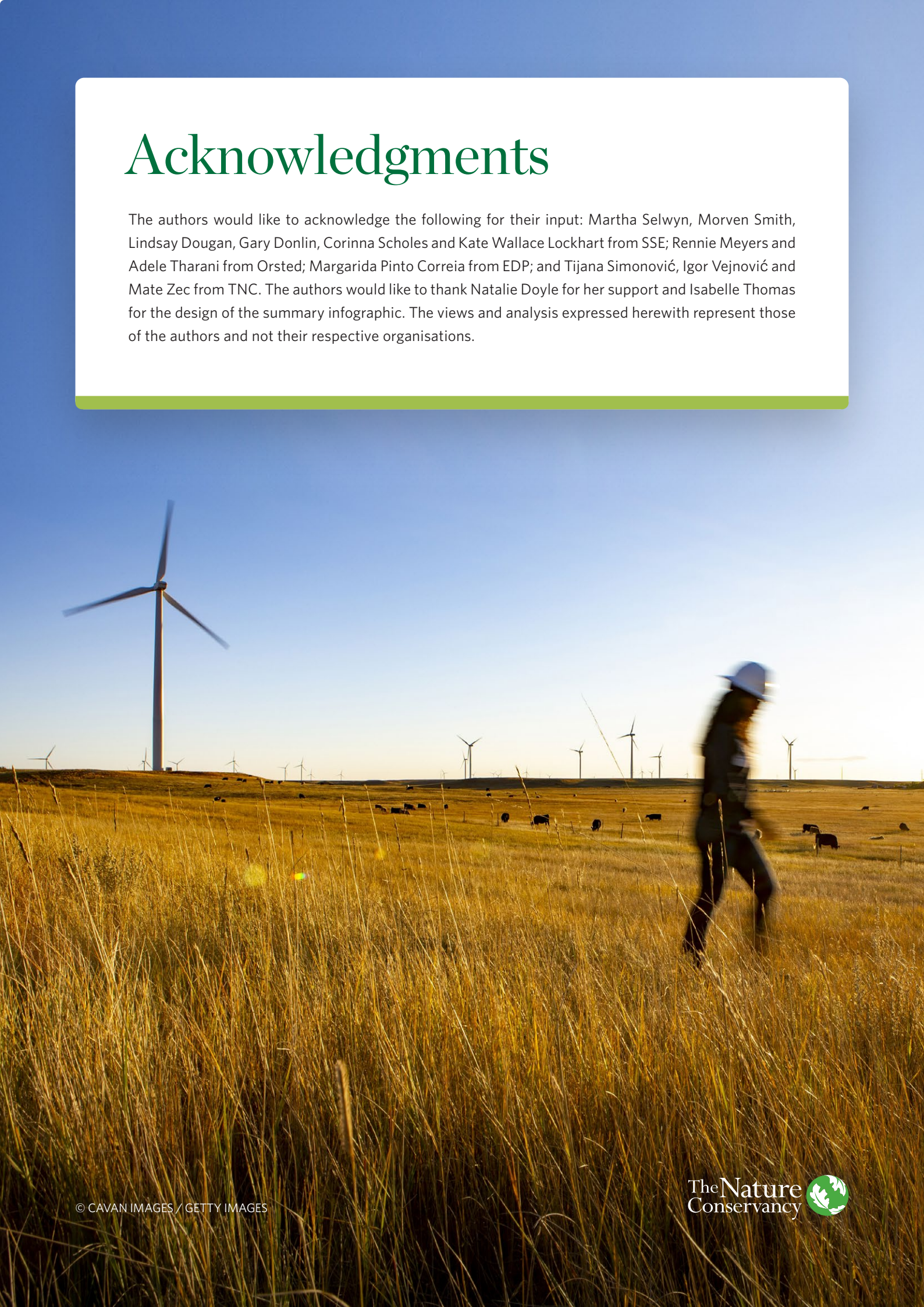
Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the following for their input: Martha Selwyn, Morven Smith, Lindsay Dougan, Gary Donlin, Corinna Scholes and Kate Wallace Lockhart from SSE; Rennie Meyers and Adele Tharani from Orsted; Margarida Pinto Correia from EDP; and Tijana Simonović, Igor Vejnović and Mate Zec from TNC. The authors would like to thank Natalie Doyle for her support and Isabelle Thomas for the design of the summary infographic. The views and analysis expressed herewith represent those of the authors and not their respective organisations.



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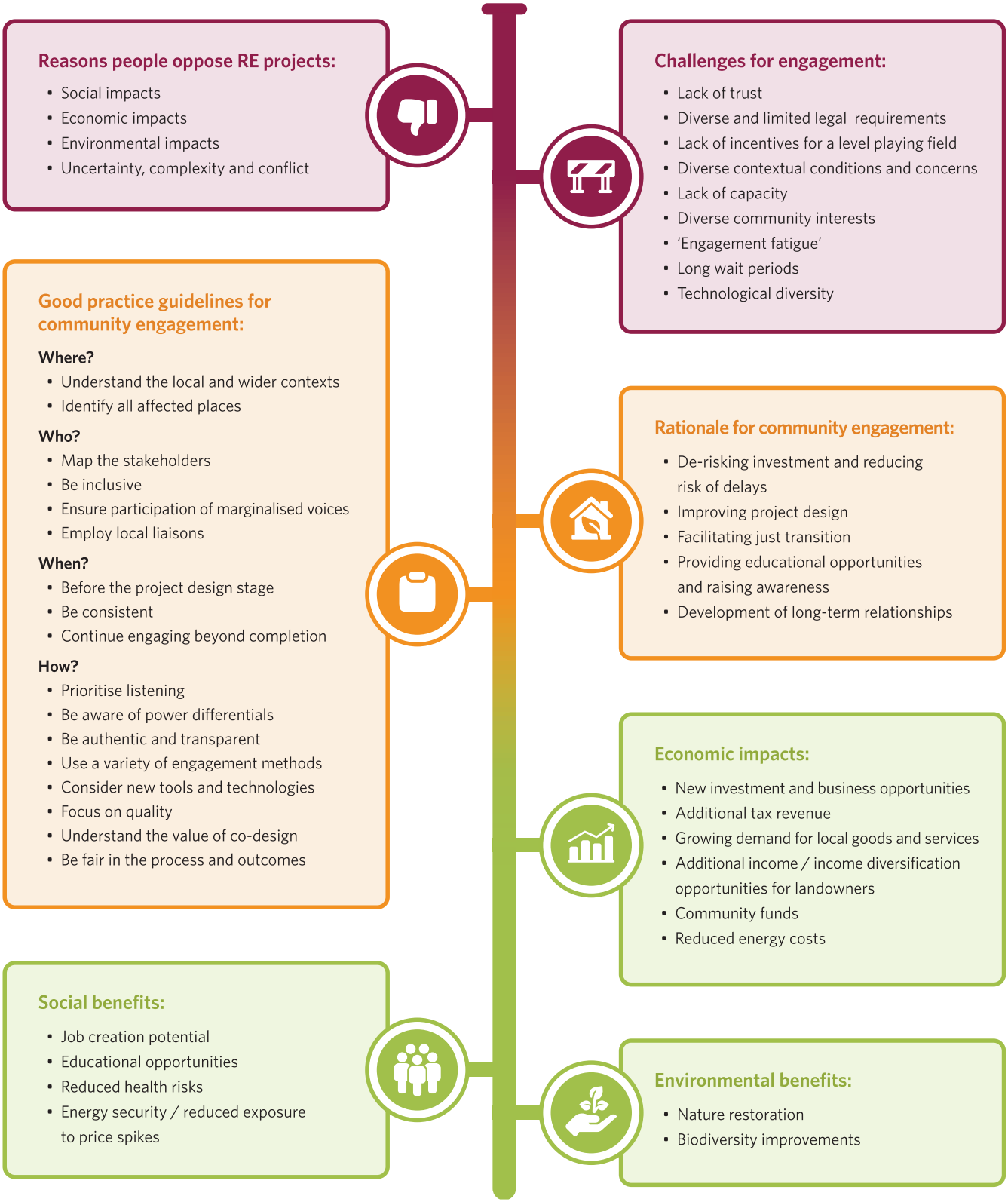
Empowering Communities through Renewable Electricity



Section 1: Introduction

At the COP28 climate summit in Dubai, more than 100 countries agreed to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030 to at least 11,000 gigawatts (GW), exceeding current growth projections by around 20 percent.[1] This aligns with the need to phase out fossil fuels and replace them with less carbon intensive energy sources to limit global warming to 1.5°C by 2100. However, it poses a big challenge: between now and 2027, as much new renewable electricity capacity will need to be added as over the last 20 years, indicating 85 percent acceleration from the previous five years.[2] Although renewables are already expanding fast, meeting the COP28 goal will require the considerable acceleration of especially solar and wind power deployment.

For the renewable energy sector, tripling capacity by 2030 means growing faster than any industry has before. There are several challenges that need to be resolved to enable this degree of accelerated development, including issues around siting of the projects, faster permitting processes, leasing agreements and grid connections.[3] There is also an important social angle to consider: as the number and size of new projects increases, so will the likelihood that more will need to be built closer to existing communities – converting land-use. This will heighten the risk of local opposition, whereby communities seek to slow down or prevent new projects due to concerns over safety and adverse impacts on environment and livelihoods.[4]

A successful energy transition hinges on local engagement and broader public support for renewables.[5,6] For project developers, finding ways to effectively engage with the communities that will be affected by new and expanding renewable energy projects is crucial. It is only through engaging with communities and demonstrating the benefits that renewable energy projects can deliver to them – without downplaying the potential disruption they may cause – that projects will be able to obtain the so-called social licence to operate. Without this, they can be subject to extensive opposition, delays, and even cancellations, damaging the companies' profitability and reputation, and slowing down the energy transition.

Successful partnerships between renewable energy developers and local communities, on the other hand, can speed up the RE transition, inform the project design process, and deliver positive impacts for people and the planet. *"When managed well, clean power infrastructure development presents a considerable opportunity to create significant business value as well as wider system value for society, the economy and the environment"*[7]. Effective community engagement and arrangements that enable local communities to benefit from renewable energy projects establish the foundation for successful partnerships between communities and project developers.

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[1] *Reuters. (2023, December 12). COP28 plan to triple renewables is doable, but not easy, companies say. Retrieved from [https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/cop28-plan-triple-renewables-is-doable-not-easy-companies-say-2023-12-12/#:~:text=DUBAI%2FLONDON%2C%20Dec%2012%20(,commitments%20floated%20at%20the%20conference.]*

[2] *International Energy Agency (IEA). (2023). Renewables 2022: Analysis and forecast to 2027. IEA Publications, France.*

[3] *Reuters. (2023, December 12). COP28 plan to triple renewables is doable, but not easy, companies say. Retrieved from [https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/cop28-plan-triple-renewables-is-doable-not-easy-companies-say-2023-12-12/#:~:text=DUBAI%2FLONDON%2C%20Dec%2012%20(,commitments%20floated%20at%20the%20conference.]*

[4] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

[5] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

[6] *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

[7] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

Effective community engagement will also improve the likelihood of a fair and just renewable energy transition. The transition to low-carbon economy will involve transforming multiple socio-technical systems over a short time period, which will have implications for policy and governance. Aside from changing the wider social, economic, and political context, the transition and all it entails will impact people's lives, communities, landscapes – including their access to recreational spaces and employment opportunities. If not carefully managed, these changes may accentuate existing inequalities. Therefore, there is a need to take distributional, procedural and recognitional justice concerns into account when planning and developing large infrastructure projects, such as renewable energy.[8] These include:

- **Distributional justice:** This is fair and equitable distribution of positive and negative impacts from large-scale energy projects and technologies across populations. Not only would this emphasise equitable allocation of benefits and burdens but would also redress existing inequities.

- **Procedural justice:** The formulation of laws, policies, and processes that are fair, equitable, and inclusive of the needs and priorities of all stakeholders especially disadvantaged communities. Key aspects would include voice, neutrality, respect and trust. Adherence to these principles would enhance perceptions of fairness and improve people's interaction with energy policies and projects.

- **Recognitional justice:** This would pay attention to neglected considerations such as relationships, context, power, vulnerability, narrative, and affect (amongst others) to adequately acknowledge various communities and stakeholder. Identifying the significance and impact of past and current structural inequities of energy project execution, such as infrastructure siting and (lack of) investments.

Energy justice will involve removing barriers that prevent equity by developing energy projects that offer groups access to tailored resources, options, and opportunities to pursue their life goals with dignity.[9]

However, much of the community engagement and benefit sharing has, so far, been delivered in an unsystematic manner, with considerable variation between companies and jurisdictions in terms of minimum requirements, resourcing, standard practices, transparency, and monitoring.

> **Despite community engagement being a longstanding integral aspect of project development for energy and infrastructure companies, there is no universally shared definition or consensus on what qualifies as 'good practice' or a 'people-positive' renewable energy project. Additionally, there is ambiguity on how community benefits can be classified, communicated, and measured.**

This white paper seeks to improve understanding of the relationships between communities and the developers of utility scale renewable energy projects, and how effective and meaningful interaction can benefit both parties. To this end, the paper identifies existing good practices for engaging communities in project and policy processes and presents a typology of potential community benefits. The purpose of this paper is to start a conversation about the benefits and opportunities of a shared understanding across renewable energy industry and European national, regional, and municipal jurisdictions over community engagement and community benefits from renewable energy projects. By offering insights into effective community engagement practices and presenting a preliminary classification of community benefits, this white paper will serve as a valuable resource for developers of renewable energy projects, communities that consider hosting them, and decision makers at local, regional, national and EU level. Although the focus of this paper is primarily on utility-scale solar and onshore wind projects in Europe, much of the analysis is applicable also to other types of utility-scale renewable energy projects.

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[8] *Arndt, Channing, Mackay Miller, Finn Tarp, Owen Zinaman, and Douglas Arent. 2017. The Political Economy of Clean Energy Transitions. Oxford University Press.*

[9] *Carley, Sanya, and David M. Konisky. 2020. "The Justice and Equity Implications of the Clean Energy Transition." Nature Energy 5 (8): 569–77. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41560-020-0641-6.*

The paper is structured into four sections. Section 2 provides background to the renewable energy upscaling challenge, focusing primarily on the European context. Section 3 delineates the justification for community engagement and describes some of the key barriers to community engagement, shedding light on factors that can impede its effectiveness. Section 4 provides a set of good practice guidelines applicable to diverse contexts and technologies. Section 5 outlines different types of benefits that communities can accrue from renewable energy projects. Section 6 concludes by proposing actionable suggestions for how various stakeholders - encompassing communities, energy companies, and different levels of government - can contribute to the advancement of the renewable energy expansion.

A brief overview of methodology

This white paper draws on, and builds upon, a non-systematic review of relevant literature and semi-structured interviews with members of TNC's Southeast Europe renewables team and a total of eight representatives from three energy companies that focus exclusively or predominantly on the development of utility-scale renewable electricity projects. Given the time constraints and scope of the project, the sample size was limited and chosen purposefully from the network of TNC. An indicative topic guide for these interviews is included in Annex A along with a list of references for the good practice guidelines reviewed (organised by the type of source).

The analysis, although largely applicable also to other contexts and technologies, is designed primarily to highlight challenges and solutions in relations to utility-scale solar and onshore wind projects in Europe. While energy communities are an emergent and fast-growing mechanism to involve communities in the RE transition, they were also excluded from the scope of this paper.

Section 2: Europe's renewable energy challenge

Renewable energy plays a pivotal role in the European Union's ambitious climate and energy agenda outlined in the EU Green Deal. With the aim of fostering sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, the EU has continuously revised its Renewable Energy Directive (RED). In 2021, the RED was amended to set a new target for renewable sources to account for 40% of the EU's power supply by 2040 under the Fit for 55 package of policy measures to achieve 55% GHG emissions reductions across the EU by 2030. This was further increased to 45% at the end of 2022 through the enactment of the REPowerEU legislation to improve energy security and reduce reliance on price-volatile fossil fuel imports. The REPowerEU plan consists of a set of emergency measures to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy projects in the EU, including a dedicated Solar Energy Strategy and temporary support for special measures by national governments to accelerate renewable energy deployment.

The combination of the EU Green Deal, the Fit for 55 package and the REPowerEU plan have boosted renewable energy investment in the EU to unprecedented levels, leading to a rapid growth in the installed solar and wind capacity. In 2023, the block installed a whopping 56 GW of new solar capacity led by Germany (14.1 GW), Spain (8.2 GW), Italy (4.8 GW), Poland (4.6 GW), and the Netherlands (4.1 GW). By the beginning of 2024, the total EU solar photovoltaic (PV) fleet amounted to 263 GW, up 27 percent from 2022. During the same year, the EU also added between 16.2 and 17.1 GW of wind capacity, notably in Northern Europe: 3.2 GW in Germany, 2.7 GW in the Netherlands, 2.5 GW in Sweden, and 1.5 GW in Poland. The increase in wind generation was particularly strong during the second half of 2023, reaching record levels in December 2023, up by 34.3 percent year-on-year.[10]

However, for the EU to meet its 2030 climate targets and international commitments – and to improve energy security – renewable energy deployment must accelerate even faster in the coming years. According to European Commission estimates, the EU will need to have 592 GW of solar PV and 510 GW of wind capacity installed by 2030[11] to achieve the 69 percent share of renewable electricity target set in the REPwerEU plan. This would require average annual additions of 48 GW of solar PV and 36 GW of wind.[12]

The EU is not alone in needing to deliver ambitious renewable energy targets. The UK Government is committed to fully decarbonising the country's power supply by 2035 – a target that would entail installing additional 50 GW of new offshore wind capacity and 70 GW of solar PV within the next seven years.[13] The United States, where the Inflation Reduction Act has attracted new investment into renewable energy, is poised to deliver 600 GW of new solar, wind, and energy storage capacity by the end of the decade.[14] In the Western Balkans (i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia), the Balkan Renewable Energy Program aims to boost the utilisation of the Western Balkans' largely untapped renewable energy potential. This initiative seeks to "green" the economies of member countries, diversify their energy mix, and facilitate their progress toward joining the European Union.[15]

The swift expansion of renewable energy capacity, particularly in wind and solar PV, poses challenges as well as opportunities, such as substantial employment, health, and climate benefits. Beyond the necessary investments and a conducive regulatory environment, renewable energy development demands substantial land resources.[16] As the quantity and size of new projects increase, they may involve alterations in land use and require placement nearer to established communities. This raises the likelihood of encountering local resistance stemming from concerns regarding safety and potential negative impacts on the environment and local livelihoods.[17] This will also become increasingly important as the EU begins the process of designating Renewable Acceleration Area (RAAs) where permitting processes will be faster and streamlined.

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[10] *Corbeau, A.-S., & Kaswiyanto, R. P. (2024, January 23). A Look Back at EU Power Generation in 2023. Retrieved from [https://www.energypolicy.columbia.edu/a-look-back-at-eu-power-generation-in-2023/#_edn8]*

[11] *European Commission. (2022, May 18). Implementing the Repower EU action plan: Investment needs, hydrogen accelerator and achieving the bio-methane targets. Retrieved from [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022SC0230&from=EN]*

[12] *IEA. (2022). Is the European Union on track to meet its REPowerEU goals? IEA, Paris. Retrieved from https://www.iea.org/reports/is-the-european-union-on-track-to-meet-its-repowereu-goals. License: CC BY 4.0*

[13] *National Grid (2024) 'Energy explained: How much of the UK's energy is renewable?'. Retrieved from https://www.nationalgrid.com/stories/energy-explained/how-much-uks-energy-renewable*

[14] *World Economic Forum (2023) 'Staggering': US on cusp of 600 GW clean energy boom'. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/04/staggering-us-on-cusp-of-600-gw-clean-energy-boom/*

[15] *UNFCCC (2023) 'Balkan Renewable Energy Program – Western Balkans'. Retrieved from https://unfccc.int/climate-action/momentum-for-change/activity-database/momentum-for-change-balkan-renewable-energy-program*

[16] *McKinsey & Company (2023) 'Land: A crucial resource for the energy transition'. Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/electric-power-and-natural-gas/our-insights/land-a-crucial-resource-for-the-energy-transition*

[17] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

Overcoming challenges such as establishing a favourable policy framework and securing accelerated investments is comparatively more straight forward than addressing opposition from the public. In the EU, for example, improved deployment of renewable energy is supported by recent amendments to the Renewable Energy Directive (RED), which set higher targets for renewable energy deployment and introduce a set of measures to simplify and streamline the administrative permitting procedures for renewable energy projects to reduce costly delays. These revisions limit the grounds for legal objections to new installations and in designated Renewables Acceleration Areas (RAAs).[18]

However, the success of renewable energy initiatives is not solely determined by the number of GWs of installed capacity, the efficiency of solar panels or the height of wind turbines. Rather, it is fundamentally connected to the integration, acceptance, and active involvement of the communities where these projects are planned and implemented, as well as the inclusion of their voices in the decision-making processes.

This is an angle that the EU policy has so far failed to address systemically: decisions related to renewable energy projects often fall under the jurisdiction of individual member states. Each country – or, in some instances, sub-national region – has its own set of regulations, guidelines, and requirements regarding community engagement, benefit sharing, and other aspects of renewable energy projects. These regulations are influenced by national energy policies, legal frameworks, local contextual factors, and public participation norms.

The varied requirements imposed across jurisdictions enable the customisation of community engagement standards to suit local needs. However, the absence of universally shared standards or principles for incorporating community engagement into project design can create a gap between governmental bodies and local communities. Companies are primarily responsible for developing their own guidelines and strategies, leading to uncertainty about what qualifies as satisfactory engagement in each location. As a result, public participation in the planning of renewable energy projects in Europe often takes place late in the permitting phase and is limited to one-directional information flow in pursuit of instrumental goals, such as convincing the public of a particular project or site, rather than open discussions about project development or design.[19]

As illustrated by numerous case studies, limited opportunities for meaningful engagement from the civil society have resulted in plans that are not always grounded in practical knowledge and real-world situations, leading to resistance and slowing down renewable energy deployment.[20] For example, plans for new onshore wind projects have been subject to local opposition in one-fifth of Dutch municipalities, with dozens of potential onshore wind projects in the Netherlands having been cancelled, delayed or put on hold amid protests from residents.[21] This is especially important when communities have legally mandated safety protocols safeguarding their rights such as the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for Indigenous and pastoralist communities. In October 2021, the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled against the construction of two key projects within the Fosen Vind initiative, namely Storheia and Roan.[22] The indigenous Sami community continues to protest against the operation of the existing wind turbines.[23] Effective community engagement could obviate such legal challenges by either planning projects in an inclusive manner or deciding not to build the project on such indigenous lands from the start as well as foster wider community acceptance of RE infrastructure and acceleration more broadly.

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[18] *Franke, A. (2023, October 9). EU adopts renewable energy directive targeting 42.5% share in 2030. Retrieved from [https://www.spglobal.com/commodityinsights/en/market-insights/latest-news/electric-power/100923-eu-adopts-renewable-energy-directive-targeting-425-share-in-2030]*

[19] *Stober, D., Suškevičs, M., Eiter, S., Müller, S., Martinát, S., & Buchecker, M. (2021). What Is the Quality of Participatory Renewable Energy Planning in Europe? A Comparative Analysis of Innovative Practices in 25 Projects. Energy Research & Social Science, 71, 101804.*

[20] *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

[21] *Energy Monitor. (2022, April 4). Weekly data: Onshore wind plans in one-fifth of Dutch municipalities affected by protests. Retrieved from [https://www.energymonitor.ai/tech/renewables/weekly-data-onshore-wind-plans-in-one-fifth-of-dutch-municipalities-affected-by-protests/?cf-view]*

[22] *Press Release - Sámi Activists Demand Removal of Wind Turbines in Fosen - IWGIA - International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs*

[23] *Dispute over Norway wind farm continues despite partial deal | Reuters*

As the number of new projects accelerates, these concerns will only intensify. This trend is evident across many European countries, including the UK:[24] While there is overarching support for renewable projects, there are valid concerns by local communities regarding the implementation of these projects. To meaningfully address this discord, it is essential to move beyond the broad and reductive descriptions of NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) and BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything) to understand the multi-faceted and valid reasons why citizens can oppose renewable energy projects.[25]

These reasons may centre around (one or more of) the following:

1. **Social impacts** – Concerns related to fair participation and opportunities for meaningful consultation and representation in the decision-making process. These concerns may relate to disregard for sovereignty and self-determination as well as threats to sites of cultural, spiritual, and ancestral significance and way of life, especially among Indigenous communities. Concerns can also relate to health and safety risks, real or perceived.

2. **Economic impacts** – Concerns related to monetary impacts such as loss of property value and restricted economic activities (e.g., loss of revenues from agriculture or tourism). Economic concerns can also relate to adverse effects on aesthetics as well as access to sites for recreational purposes, which could affect income from tourism.[26]

3. **Environmental impacts** – Concerns related to threats to endangered species, protection of natural ecosystems and biodiversity. Environmental concerns can get amplified if communities have a direct dependence on those ecosystems for their livelihoods or if the areas concerned have cultural significance.[27]

4. **Impacts due to institutional uncertainty, complexity, or conflict** – Apprehensions can arise from the absence of legal or regulatory frameworks that sufficiently acknowledge, tackle, and safeguard the interests of communities, including land tenure. These concerns may be rooted in uncertainty, a lack of comprehension, a sense of powerlessness, or misinformation. At times, issues related to a community's right to self-determination are exacerbated by conflicting interests regarding jurisdictional authority, involving local, regional, federal, state, or even intergovernmental bodies.

Acknowledging and addressing community concerns forms a vital part of a successful community engagement strategy to enable renewable energy developers to secure support a social licence to operate, as envisaged in The Nature Conservancy's 3C (climate, conservation, communities) framework.[28] Extensive and timely community engagement that commences prior to (i.e.national/local level renewable energy spatial planning processes) and during the project design stage can enable renewable energy project developers to identify the community's concerns and develop strategies to mitigate or avoid them. Benefit sharing mechanisms can then be designed in collaboration with the affected communities to compensate them for any disruption or adverse impacts that cannot be avoided or mitigated, in ways that are meaningful and acceptable.[29]

The subsequent sections of this white paper explain the rationale for directing resources into community engagement, outline some good practice guidelines for effective community engagement and present a typology of community benefits that renewable energy projects can deliver. 'Good practices' can be defined as "**strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result.**"[30]

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[24] *Energy Monitor. (2022, May 18). How to overcome local opposition to wind projects. Retrieved from [https://www.energymonitor.ai/finance/corporate-strategy/how-developers-can-overcome-local-opposition-to-onshore-wind-projects/]*

[25] *Susskind, L., Chun, J., Gant, A., Hodgkins, C., Cohen, J., & Lohmar, S. (2022). Sources of opposition to renewable energy projects in the United States. Energy Policy, 165, 112922. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.112922; Devine-Wright, P. (2011). Public engagement with large-scale renewable energy technologies: breaking the cycle of NIMBYism. WIREs Clim Change, 2, 19-26. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.89*

[26] *Enserink, M., Van Etteger, R., Van den Brink, A., & Stremke, S. (2022). To support or oppose renewable energy projects? A systematic literature review on the factors influencing landscape design and social acceptance. Energy Research & Social Science, 91, 102740. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2022.102740*

[27] *Devine-Wright, P. (2011). Place attachment and public acceptance of renewable energy: A tidal energy case study. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 31 (4), 336-343. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2011.07.001*

[28] *Nature.org. Beyond Carbon-Free. Retrieved from [https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/Beyond_Carbon_Free_Whitepaper_Final.pdf]*

[29] *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

[30] *European Commission. What is good practice? Retrieved from https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/page/what-are-good-practices_en*

Section 3: Community engagement: Understanding the rationale and challenges

> ***To maximize system value, community engagement needs to be an integral part of the project life cycle from site selection to decommissioning. This helps ensure a better understanding of the local cultural, environmental, and economic needs at each stage and can guide business decisions.***[31]

3.1. The rationale for community engagement

The importance of community engagement within the realm of renewable energy initiatives is paramount. It serves as the foundation for sustainable and influential endeavours, providing numerous advantages for people and the planet by expediting the deployment of renewable energy. Meaningful and efficient community engagement yields benefits not only for the communities involved but also for renewable energy companies seeking to advance new projects. While this section emphasises the rationale and advantages of community engagement for these two entities, it is crucial to recognise that community engagement will also be pivotal in assisting national governments in addressing potential concerns that could lead to opposition, or breaching community rights, in the designation of Renewables Acceleration Areas (RAAs) and renewable energy spatial planning overall.

Drawing on existing literature (see Annex A), interview data and energy companies' own resources,[32] this study identifies five key benefits that may be derived from effective community engagement during the project planning stage.

1. **De-risking investment and reducing risk of delays:** Renewable energy projects are often time-intensive and capital-intensive, preceded by a long planning and permitting process and requiring considerable initial investment. This investment can be jeopardised if the project is delayed or cancelled due to opposition from communities and local stakeholders. A timely and well-designed community engagement process helps to build trust and foster support for renewable energy projects, helping to protect investments and strengthening the business case for it. When communities are involved in the planning and decision-making processes, they are more likely to accept and endorse the project. This support is crucial for smooth project implementation, minimising resistance, and avoiding potential delays or conflicts.

2. **Improving project design:** Involving community members allows for valuable input and insights regarding local concerns, preferences, and potential impacts. This engagement facilitates better project design, such as enhanced consideration of factors such as landscape, cultural heritage, and wildlife conservation. As a result, the project can be tailored to mitigate negative impacts and maximise positive outcomes for the community.

[31] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

[32] *EDF Renewables. The benefits to our communities. Retrieved from [https://www.edf-re.uk/working-with-communities/the-community-fund/]*

3. **Facilitating just transition:** Renewable energy projects can bring economic opportunities to communities through job creation, infrastructure development, and increased local investment (these are discussed in more detail in Section 4 of this report). Engaging with communities can help to identify local needs and vulnerabilities, and to ensure benefits from renewable energy projects are equitably distributed and contribute to the socioeconomic development of the area. Furthermore, academic literature provides evidence that perceptions of fairness and justice (procedurally and in benefit sharing) can increase community acceptance of projects.[33,34,35,36]

4. **Providing educational opportunities and raising awareness:** Community engagement serves as an avenue for education and awareness about renewable energy. It helps to dispel misconceptions, provides information about the benefits of clean energy, and can encourage more sustainable consumption patterns.

5. **Development of long-term relationships:** Establishing positive relationships and ongoing communication with the community creates a foundation for lasting partnerships beyond project completion. Building a legacy of trust and collaboration benefits both the project and the community in the long run. If a renewable energy developer and other stakeholders have invested into their reputation, that can help them expand operations.

> **The rationale for community engagement is instrumental (merely means-to-an-end such as get a project approved), substantive (beneficial such as to improve efficiency of a project) and normative (meaningful to do with justice and fairness consideration at its core).**

As stressed by Devine Wright, Devine Wright and Cowell (2016)[37] and Stober et al (2021)[38], and backed by the respondents in our interviews, treating community engagement as the right thing to do rather than as tick-box exercise can engender short-term benefits for the project as well as longer-term benefits for the wider community. Speeding up the deployment of renewable energy at a rapid pace and scale carries the risk of centralised decision-making in project authorisation, potentially neglecting local engagement which could yield benefits for both project developers and the communities affected.

3.2. Challenges for effective community engagement

The interview data collected during this research revealed certain challenges that companies often face when seeking to engage with the local communities to secure a social licence to operate. This section outlines some of the key challenges to effective community engagement. While some of these factors have been mentioned in existing literature and companies' internal documentation, the typology presented below is drafted by the authors drawing primarily on the interview data.

The good practice guidelines in Section 4 of this paper can be deployed to address most of the following challenges.

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[33] *Gross, C. (2007). Community perspectives of wind energy in Australia: The application of a justice and community fairness framework to increase social acceptance. Energy Policy, 35 (5), 2727-2736. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2006.12.013*

[34] *Liu, L., Bouman, T., Perlaviciute, G., & Steg, L. (2020). Public participation in decision making, perceived procedural fairness and public acceptability of renewable energy projects. *Energy and Climate Change, 1*, 100013. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egycc.2020.100013.*

[35] *Segreto, M., Principe, L., Desormeaux, A., Torre, M., Tomassetti, L., Tratzi, P., Paolini, V., & Petracchini, F. (2020). Trends in Social Acceptance of Renewable Energy Across Europe—A Literature Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17 (24), 9161. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17249161*

[36] *Hogan, J. L., Warren, C. R., Simpson, M., & McCauley, D. (2022). What makes local energy projects acceptable? Probing the connection between ownership structures and community acceptance. Energy Policy, 171, 113257. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.113257.*

[37] *Devine-Wright, P., Devine-Wright, H., & Cowell, R. (2016). What do we know about overcoming barriers to siting energy infrastructure in local areas? Retrieved from [https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/93905/1/DECC_Infrastructure_PlacewiseLtd.pdf]*

[38] *Stober, D., Suškevičs, M., Eiter, S., Müller, S., Martinát, S., & Buchecker, M. (2021). What is the quality of participatory renewable energy planning in Europe? A comparative analysis of innovative practices in 25 projects. Energy Research & Social Science, 71, 101804. ISSN 2214-6296. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101804.*

Some of the main challenges for effective community engagement are:

1. **Lack of trust:** Distrust in project proponents, government officials, or the industry poses a barrier to active participation and successful community engagement. This lack of trust may stem from previous experiences at the community level, where developers failed to implement participatory processes or excluded the community from decision-making[39] Alternatively, it can be fuelled by widely publicised negative experiences in other communities or misinformation.[40]

2. **Diverse and limited legal requirements:** Statutory requirements around community engagement vary between jurisdictions and are often very limited,[41] leaving it largely to the developer to determine what degree of community engagement and benefit sharing will be sufficient to secure them with a social licence to operate. Community engagement requirements are often vague[42] and regarded as less important than price in competitive bidding processes, such as auctions. In many jurisdictions, regulations setting minimum criteria for community engagement are lacking or limited in scope, enabling companies to get a planning permission for a new project without extensive or inclusive community engagement. This means that community concerns are not always adequately addressed, and companies are able to develop projects without committing to delivering benefits for the community in line with their needs and aspirations. Even if this is not the industry norm, instances that generate a lot of negative publicity risk eroding confidence in the renewable energy sector.[43]

3. **Lack of incentives for a level playing field:** In the absence of shared guidelines or comprehensive legal mandates, a significant commitment to community engagement can render project developers less competitive on pricing compared to counterparts who do not prioritise such engagement. Thus, renewable energy companies investing heavily in community engagement may encounter challenges to their competitiveness, particularly in instances where pricing is considered the primary criterion for awarding contracts.

4. **Diverse contextual conditions and concerns:** Community concerns are influenced by a range of contextual factors, including economic structure, population profile, culture, identity and past experiences. Communities that have a thriving tourism trade may be more concerned about the environmental or landscape impact than potential employment opportunities, unlike communities that struggle to retain young people due to lack of local jobs. Communities with negative past experiences can be reluctant to engage with new developers, while communities who have firsthand experience of benefiting from renewable energy projects are likely to be more open to discussion and more knowledgeable about potential benefits sharing agreements.

5. **Lack of capacity:** Communities that have no previous engagement with renewable electricity projects developers may not know how to effectively engage with them, what to ask and how to negotiate to maximise benefits to the local community. Many communities, especially in rural and sparsely populated areas, do not have sufficient legal knowledge or resources to hire a lawyer to represent their interest. Vulnerable communities and individuals are particularly prone to lacking the necessary knowledge or resources to engage effectively or to ensure their voices are heard.

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[39] *Kallis, G., Stephanides, P., Bailey, E., Devine-Wright, P., Chalvatzis, K., & Bailey, I. (2021). The challenges of engaging island communities: Lessons on renewable energy from a review of 17 case studies. Energy Research & Social Science, 81, 102257. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.102257*

Segreto, M., Principe, L., Desormeaux, A., Torre, M., Tomassetti, L., Tratzi, P., Paolini, V., & Petracchini, F. (2020). Trends in Social Acceptance of Renewable Energy Across Europe—A Literature Review. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17(24), 9161. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17249161

[40] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

[41] *Stober, D., Suškevičs, M., Eiter, S., Müller, S., Martinát, S., & Buchecker, M. (2021). What Is the Quality of Participatory Renewable Energy Planning in Europe? A Comparative Analysis of Innovative Practices in 25 Projects. Energy Research & Social Science, 71, 101804.*

[42] *Aitken, M., Haggett, C., & Rudolph, D. P. (2014). Wind Farms Community Engagement Good Practice Review.*

[43] *Victoria State Government. (2021, July) Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development: A Guide for Renewable Energy Developers. Retrieved from [https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/621970/community-engagement-and-benefit-sharing-in-renewable-energy-development.pdf]*

6. **Diverse community interests across different stakeholder groups:** Divergent stakeholder groups within a community may have distinct priorities and objectives, leading to a misalignment of community interests. The varied perspectives and concerns can create challenges in achieving consensus or common ground. Factors such as economic considerations, environmental concerns, and social impacts may be weighted differently by different stakeholders, contributing to the complexity of aligning community interests. Recognising and navigating these differences is crucial in fostering effective community engagement. Inclusive engagement through representative sampling of all community groups, ensuring the involvement of vulnerable and historically marginalized communities, is important in planning processes as often when there are diverse community interests, disadvantaged individuals are less likely to be represented among stakeholder groups and efforts to collect community interest.

7. **'Engagement fatigue':** Communities in regions experiencing extensive renewable electricity development may need to deal with various project developers, who do not all follow the same protocols. Managing interactions with multiple developers is time-consuming but not subject to financial compensation, presenting a burden on individuals, households, and community groups. Although different projects all impact one another, the companies developing, owning, and operating these projects are not necessarily working together to minimise the time commitment burden and to maximise the benefits to the local communities.

8. **Long wait periods:** Project developers are typically unable to commence delivering community benefits until the project receives approval. While certain benefits may become apparent during the project development phase, others only manifest once the project is operational. The potential delay in realising benefits, especially when significant disruptions occur during project development, can lead to frustration and scepticism within communities.

9. **Technological diversity:** Different technologies exert distinct effects on communities, landscapes, and environments. Technological differences also influence the benefits that can arise from a project, such as the resources available for Community Funds and the quantity of new jobs a project can generate. Articulating these intricacies to community representatives with limited technical knowledge can be challenging.

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Section 4: Good practice guidelines for community engagement

Because each community is unique, a 'one-size fits-all' approach to community engagement will not work in all contexts. Moreover, different renewable energy technologies have different siting requirements, implementation frameworks, and legal constraints – all of which may influence the concerns that fuel the local opposition to these projects. However, it is possible to outline some good practice guidelines, and to provide examples of good practices that many project developers have found to be effective, enabling them to work together with communities, reducing resistance to renewable electivity projects and securing a social licence to operate.

4.1 Where to engage?

Understand and respect the local context (recognitional justice): Before initiating direct engagement, it is essential to obtain a thorough understanding of the community context, including its economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions.

This approach empowers stakeholders to pose pertinent questions, identify unique needs, navigate conflicting perceptions, and establish trust, allowing for the development of context-sensitive options to be tailored for the community.

This initial step involves grasping the community's characteristics and priorities while acknowledging the existing efforts undertaken by community members. Thorough preparation includes reaching out to contacts within the community to inquire and gain insights into the community's context, including the presence of vulnerable households or population groups, divisions within the community and potential needs for technical or legal assistance.

Understand the wider context: Each community is situated within a wider context with a specific policy framework entailing legal requirements and regulatory regimes. Communities are also impacted by wider social, political and geographical events within their regional, national and international context. There is a need for a greater focus on geography, which entails interweaving space-based considerations (e.g., local politics and policies) and national (or EU-level) renewable energy goals.[44]

Identify all affected places and communities: Sometimes the impact of a project will spillover beyond the local site and the communities identified by the government's planning and permitting processes. Therefore, it is important to identify which communities will be impacted and how.

4.2 Who to engage?

Map the stakeholders: Map stakeholders and identify how each stakeholder group may be impacted, acknowledging that their views may be diverse or even conflicting. Local knowledge and priorities can improve the engagement process and the final project design, creating system value.

Be inclusive: Working with multiple stakeholders and enlisting their buy-in can often accelerate the rollout of projects.

EXAMPLE

Offshore wind planning and marine protection in the Belgian Sea[45], Strategic planning for wind in Burgenland[46]

[44] *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

[45] *BOP. (2021, June 24). Wind energy and nature protection can and must advance together in the North Sea – Belgian Offshore Platform. Retrieved from [https://www.belgianoffshoreplatform.be/en/news/wind-energy-and-nature-protection-can-and-must-advance-together-in-the-north-sea/]*

[46] *Land Burgenland. (2017). Erneuerbare Energie - Modell Burgenland. Retrieved from [https://www.burgenland.at/news-detail/erneuerbare-energie-modell-burgenland/]*

It is useful to establish an inclusive and transparent framework to collect and evaluate input, make decisions and share feedback.

Ensure participation of marginalised segments: It is also important to consider which stakeholders' voices are generally marginalised or excluded from traditional methods of engagement and make a conscious effort to remedy that. For instance, meetings after working hours could exclude people without access to childcare, meetings at inaccessible venues could exclude people with disabilities etc. Similarly, some processes are less trusted by minorities and can be exclusive. Deployment of novel, virtual and asynchronous methods can address this (discussed below in detail in 4.4).

Employ local liaisons and experts: Using representatives and experts from the local community is not only important bridge-building exercise but tapping into community knowledge and local expertise. Working with a locally based facilitator helps in many ways, including by building trust, supporting community agency, and assisting the community with plan follow-through, in addition to positioning community members as leaders and bolstering community members' power in decision-making.[47] It could also ensure higher levels of participation from the community in the process.

4.3 When to engage?

Begin at the beginning: Starting engagement processes early and consulting locals and civil society broadly well in advance of the launch of a project is widely seen as a key to success.[48] Some, as is the case in Slovakia, are developing guidelines to "early intervention" and timelines that structure engagement, adding an element of predictability to the dialogue between developers and locals.[49]

EXAMPLE

Early Community Engagement – ACE Severn Road wind turbine, England[50]

Be consistent: Keeping the community informed about the progress of the project throughout its lifecycle (as well as beyond) is crucial for maintaining engagement. This could involve regular newsletters, community meetings, a dedicated website with updates on the project, a designated community liaison or point-of-contact, or a meaningful local physical presence such as an engagement office.

Continue engaging beyond completion: Ongoing and longstanding engagement can help build trust and maintain relationships that not only aid the operation of completed projects but also get buy-in for future projects.

EXAMPLE

Kype Muir Wind Farm Extension, Scotland[51]

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[47] *Ayala, R., Drehobl, A., and Dewey, A. (2021) Fostering Equity Through Community-Led Clean Energy Strategies. Washington, D.C.: American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. https://aceee.org/research-report/u2105.*

[48] *Dietz, D and Stern, P. C (2008) Public participation in environmental assessment and decision making. The National Academies Press.*

[49] *Schleswig Holstein. (2023, January). Energy Transition and Climate Protection - West Coast Pipeline: Planning in Dialogue. Retrieved from [https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/fachinhalte/E/energiewende/dialogverfahren_westkuestenleitung.html]*

[50] *Centre for Sustainable Energy. (December, 2021). Community Engagement and Benefits for Onshore Wind in England. Retrieved from [https://centreforsustainableenergy.ams3.digitaloceanspaces.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/18215655/community-engagement-and-benefits-for-onshore-wind-in-england-dec-2021.pdf*

[51] *ibid*

4.4 How to engage?

Prioritise listening to speaking: Didactic and one-way communication may breed mistrust and resentment, while actively listening to community voices, considering their concerns, and leveraging their insider knowledge and technical expertise fosters bridge-building. Active listening enables the adoption of other best practices such as grasping the local context and formulating a more equitable and adaptable engagement strategy.

Be mindful of power differentials: Some stakeholders in the community engagement process such as project developers and governmental bodies, hold greater power due to their access to financial and technical resources and systemic factors such as their positioning within the structural context. Designating those with technical expertise as the "experts" and community members as the "public" upholds power imbalances and threatens community agency. Those conducting technical assistance are experts on specific, technical topics, but community members are experts on their community and likely on a diverse set of other topics. Therefore, community engagement processes should acknowledge this meaningfully.

Be authentic and transparent: Transparency about the project's benefits, challenges, and impacts can build trust and foster a sense of partnership between developers and the community. Providing the information in an accessible and non-technical format may also be essential for wider reach. Reporting and information should also include all aspects including social, economic and ecological to ensure that communities are well-informed. Developing fair and equitable benefits sharing mechanisms in collaboration with community stakeholders well in advance of a project beginning operations is also helpful. Further, funds need to be traced and published, ensuring that leaders can be held accountable.

Use a variety of engagement methods: There are a myriad of methods and instruments available for community engagement and they should be employed tailored to the situation and context. These can include more traditional tools like newsletters, in-person engagement, workshops, discussion forums/public consultations, print and broadcast media ads, but can also include more innovative and novel methods such as digital outreach and communication, employing local liaisons, non-traditional townhalls, engaging with community stakeholders like schools, youth groups etc. Relying on wide variety of methods that target different demographics and aspects within the community can lead to better and sustained engagement. There is evidence that these wider and more innovative methods may have a positive impact on acceptance because they allow a wider range of responses in different forms, demonstrate effort on behalf of a developer, and allow more two-way interaction between developers and local people.[52]

Consider new tools and technologies: New technologies such as AI for data analysis and geographical information systems (GIS) for landscape mapping can enhance the development and sustainability of engagement strategies. Several for-profit and non-profit firms are actively developing tools and software that can facilitate engagement strategies by simplifying stakeholder management.[53] Furthermore, frameworks are being developed by civil society, think tanks and academia to enable concerned parties and project developers to think systematically about site selection, social feasibility analysis, social risk analysis, stakeholder management etc. For example, an interactive planning tool designed by Flacke and De Boer (2017)[54] to address social acceptance and stakeholder management of renewable energy in the Netherlands could be deployed in various contexts. Gonzalez and Connell (2022)[55] have also developed a decision support tool for site selection for renewable energy projects.

However, while novel technologies and instruments have the potential to democratise information and participation, they can also accentuate existing inequities or introduce ones. People's access to, and understanding of, new technologies is influenced by multifarious factors, such as educational background, socioeconomic status, geographical location etc. When advanced technologies are deployed in community engagement, it is essential to ensure that this is done in a manner that enhances justice and fairness.

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[52] *Aitken, M., Haggett, C., & Rudolph, D. (2016). Wind Farms Community Engagement Good Practice Review. Retrieved from [https://www.climatexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/wind_farms_-_review_of_good_practice_on_community_engagement_-_final_report_14_06_16.pdf]*

[53] *Robichaud, F. (2023, September 27). Stakeholders in Renewable Energy. Boreal Environmental. Retrieved from [https://www.boreal-is.com/blog/stakeholders-in-renewable-energy/]*

[54] *Flacke, J., & De Boer, C. (2017). An Interactive Planning Support Tool for Addressing Social Acceptance of Renewable Energy Projects in The Netherlands. ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information, 6(10), 313. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi6100313*

[55] *González, A., & Connell, P. (2022). Developing a renewable energy planning decision-support tool: Stakeholder input guiding strategic decisions. Applied Energy, 312, 118782. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2022.118782.*

Using technology equitably: GIS is a powerful tool to process and analyse geospatial data to identify suitable sites for renewable energy projects, taking into consideration economic viability, geographic suitability and the risk of social and environmental conflict. When integrated into the project siting process, information collected through GIS can facilitate the evaluation of land-use trade-offs and inform decision-making around renewable energy development. To this end, the development and use of social indicators, which represent cultural, economic, or ecological connections between individuals or communities and the land, offers valuable insights into spatial patterns and concentrations of potential social conflicts.[56]

Participatory mapping or public participation geographic information system (PPGIS) is recognized as one valuable approach to integrating community engagement with GIS, as evidenced in existing literature.[57] It enables regional and national authorities to incorporate public participation in the decision-making process, fostering a sense of collaboration and empowering communities. For example, by inviting local community members to identify or geolocate 'places of importance' on a map corresponding to project-relevant information (e.g., key social values, siting preferences, concerns), PPGIS can capture social factors as well as the material and non-material benefits attributed to certain lands. This information can be integrated into a broader GIS approach to identify areas where project development may be less likely to cause conflict. It can also be used to proactively to evaluate trade-offs with community values and preferences identified at a local scale.

However, it is imperative that all GIS-driven siting strategies and processes undergo validation through qualitative community engagement. This process ensures that project location decisions are not disproportionately influenced by individuals with greater confidence in new technologies, potentially neglecting the needs of vulnerable communities and households.

Focus on quality: Many interviewees highlighted engagement fatigue as a significant concern, particularly when multiple projects are either underway or planned simultaneously within a specific area. Therefore, it is crucial to utilise appropriate methods and tools for engagement in a manner that maximises benefits for all involved parties. Leveraging past experiences and collective learning can help identify methods that have proven successful previously. The better project developers understand the context, key challenges, and concerns, the easier it is for them to adjust the engagement plan to align with the needs of both the project and the community. Utilising existing information, such as survey data, can serve as a starting point to gain insights into the local population before engaging directly, which often requires a significant time commitment from their end.

Understand the value of co-design: Effective community engagement necessitates a collaborative, bidirectional process that empowers communities instead of simply involving them. In a co-design approach, decisions remain receptive to the information provided by community members and adaptable to new insights. Project developers thoughtfully and carefully consider input from communities. Co-design allows communities to not just greenlight the project but influence the nature and design. This could potentially engender less resistance as there is a greater sense of ownership.

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[56] *Neugarten, R.A., Chaplin-Kramer, R., Sharp, R.P., Schuster, R., Strimas-Mackey, M., Roehrdanz, P.R., Mulligan, M., van Soesbergen, A., Hole, D., Kennedy, C.M. and Oakleaf, J.R., Johnson, J., Kiesecker, J., Polasky, S., Handson, J. O. & Rodewald, A. D. 2024. Mapping the planet's critical areas for biodiversity and nature's contributions to people. Nature communications, 15(1), p.261.*

Popovich, N., Figueroa, A. J., Sunter, D. A., & Shah, M. (2024). Identifying disadvantaged communities in the United States: An energy-oriented mapping tool that aggregates environmental and socioeconomic burdens. Energy Research & Social Science, 109, 103391.

Pocewicz, A., & Nielsen-Pincus, M. (2013). Preferences of Wyoming residents for siting of energy and residential development. Applied Geography, 43, 45-55.

Müller, S., Backhaus, N., & Buchecker, M. (2020). Mapping meaningful places: A tool for participatory siting of wind turbines in Switzerland?. Energy Research & Social Science, 69, 101573.

Mekonnen, A. D., & Gorsevski, P. V. (2015). A web-based participatory GIS (PGIS) for offshore wind farm suitability within Lake Erie, Ohio. Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, 41, 162-177.

Green, D. R. (2010). The role of Public Participatory Geographical Information Systems (PPGIS) in coastal decision-making processes: An example from Scotland, UK. Ocean & Coastal Management, 53(12), 816-821.

Fournier, E. D., Federico, F., Cudd, R., & Pincetl, S. (2023). Building an interactive web mapping tool to support distributed energy resource planning using public participation GIS. Applied Geography, 152, 102877.

[57] *Sieber, R. (2006). Public participation geographic information systems: A literature review and framework. Annals of the association of American Geographers, 96(3), 491-507.*

Be fair in the process (procedural justice): Ensuring fairness in the process necessitates providing local residents with meaningful opportunities to shape and influence the development's design and outcomes. This active involvement should encompass participation, access to well-rounded information, and the consideration of their ideas. This fairness is reinforced by opportunities for collective discussion, such as neighbourhood meetings, community reference groups, workshops, and forums. Developers should transparently report on the feedback received and how it influenced their decisions.

> **Approaches such as 'decide-announce-defend', where key decisions are made before seeking community input (e.g., through planning requirements for public display and comment), typically fall short of creating a perception of fairness. Social acceptance becomes challenging when community outreach is labelled as consultation but only involves one-way flow of information.**

Be fair in outcomes (distributional justice): Perceptions of fairness hinge on how the financial and non-financial benefits of a renewable energy project are distributed to, and within, the local community throughout project stages. Equity considerations and benefit sharing arrangements influence how communities perceive and handle the project's impacts. Open discussions between the project developer and the community regarding the nature and scale of the expected benefits must occur prior to the project development stage to establish shared understanding and expectations. Developing a clear benefit sharing plan early in process empowers the community and informs their engagement. Comprehensive information enables communities to negotiate and participate in benefit sharing agreements effectively.

It is crucial that the benefits align with the project's scale and extend beyond direct payments. Numerous studies consistently highlight that benefit sharing, whether through complete or partial community ownership or investment, significantly contributes to garnering local support for the development. The benefits that may accrue are discussed in more detail in Section 5 of this paper. However, it is also crucial to recognize recent studies indicating that this type of benefit sharing must be designed and implemented very carefully to advance energy justice.[58]

4.5 From good practice guidelines to community empowerment strategy

Good practice guidelines can form the basis for transforming community engagement from an instrumental means-to-an-end process to a more empowering strategy. It is important for community engagement strategies to emphasise procedural and distributive justice as the substantive rationale, ensuring that communities derive tangible benefits from the engagement process.

The following framework has been adapted from International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s (2014) 'Spectrum of Public Participation', Hindmarsh (2020)[59], Lane and Hicks (2017)[60], Joint Institute for Strategic Energy Analysis (JISEA)(2022)[61] and Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (2021)[62] and supplemented with information from the interviews conducted in the course of this project. It tries to envisage what various orders of community engagement can look like in practice as companies attempt to move from unidirectional flows of information to collaborating with communities in an empowering manner. It will involve all stakeholders to move beyond expediency and net financial gain and being committed to principles of energy justice.

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[58] *van Bommel, N., Hoffken, J. (2021). Energy justice within, between and beyond European community energy initiatives: A review. Energy Research & Social Science 79, 102157. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629621002504*

[59] *Hindmarsh, R. (2010). Wind Farms and Community Engagement in Australia: A Critical Analysis for Policy Learning. East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal, 4(4), 541-563. https://doi.org/10.1215/s12280-010-9155-9*

[60] *Lane, T., & Hicks, J. (2017). Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development: A Guide for Applicants to the Victorian Renewable Energy Target Auction. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Victorian Government, Melbourne.*

[61] *Ross, L., & Day, M. (Joint Institute for Strategic Energy Analysis, National Renewable Energy Laboratory). (2022). Community Energy Planning: Best Practices and Lessons Learned in NREL's Work with Communities.*

[62] *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. (2021, December) Community Engagement and Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: good practice guidance for England. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b87e3b8fa8f50384489ccb/community-engagement-and-benefits-from-onshore-wind.pdf]*

Table 1: *Enhancing community engagement: From informing to empowering*

Participation Level	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Community Engagement Objective	Provide balanced and objective information assist the community in understanding all aspects of the project, including possible problems/issues.	Obtain feedback from the community on plans, options and/or decisions.	Work directly with the community throughout all stages of the project ensure community concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	Partner with the community in each aspect of planning, development and decision making, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Community to co-lead the development of the renewable energy project place decision making involves the community directly.
Community Engagement Commitment	Keep the community informed through all stages of development, including issues and delays.	Keep the community informed listen and acknowledge suggestions and concerns provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.	Work with the community to ensure concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed. Provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.	Look to the community for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions. Incorporate advice and recommendations into decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Community is involved in the design and no decisions are taken without community buy-in.
Community Engagement Outcome	Securing a suitable site to install the renewable energy facility. Gaining planning permission. Meeting compliance regulations.	Minimising objections. Effectively managing complaints. Good stakeholder relations . A level of community awareness and trust in the project.	Long-term broad local social acceptance and knowledge of the project. Strengthened local relationships and trust. Local advocates for renewable energy.	Broad community participation, support and awareness. Some sense of local ownership. Greater community benefit. Strong local relationships and trust. Timely development and easier planning approval. Some sharing of benefits beyond investors.	Community ownership in the project. (both literal and metaphorical). Community benefits justly and equitably shared. Citizen juries.
Example Techniques	Face-to-face meetings with key stakeholders (e.g. Parish councils). Door-knocking in the closest or most affected neighbourhoods. Press release to local media and advert in local paper. Setting up a website with clear contact information, including an opportunity to subscribe to updates or request a phone call or meeting with a representative from the developer. Posters on noticeboards, village halls, community venues, post offices, pubs.	In-person exhibitions and online public briefing events with meeting spaces for private discussions to address individuals' concerns. Attendance at community meetings and events to follow-up on key topics. Local polls and surveys to give people the chance to express opinions rapidly. The developer should make it as easy as possible for people to contact them by establishing a range of different communication channels: phone, email, social media, call-me function on website etc." Keep website updated with presentations, recordings, and videos from engagement events.	Using traditional methods of engagement, such as surveys, telephone polls, door knocking, and in-person events. Using digital methods, such as maintaining a project website, using 3D visualisations and multimedia, hosting webinars, and accessing social media. Using community outreach techniques and utilising established channels of communication to engage the community e.g., through local newspapers, magazines, and radio, identifying existing events and groups. Providing safe spaces for individuals to discuss and feedback, such as arranging ways for issues to be discussed on a one-to-one basis or establishing anonymous voting arrangements at key meetings; and Using independent experts to discuss specific concerns.	Identifying local community representatives and working through them, and with them. For example, employing local people to gather community views. Local upskilling programme. Youth awareness and training programmes (such as partnering with schools).	Citizen oversight committees. Regular Ballots. Meeting between decision makers, stakeholders and local community members. Participatory mapping or public geographic information system (PPGIS).

Section 5: Community benefits

> ***It's one thing to go out there and tell people what we are about to do, and another to actually work with the local people to do it well and in a way that delivers benefits for them.***[63]

5.1 The rationale for providing community benefits

Utility scale renewable energy projects can impact the host communities in various ways, depending on how the project is designed and implemented, and the extent to which the community stakeholders' views and concerns are addressed by the project developers.

Projects can have impacts that are positive or negative, permanent or temporary.

> **Beyond minimizing negative impact, businesses should provide fair compensation where relevant and create a plan for sharing direct and indirect benefits with the affected communities in an equitable way that takes distributional, procedural and recognitional justice into account.**

Distribution of benefits should be transparent and can take multiple forms, including:

- community benefits agreements (CBAs) that outline benefits such as social investment funds, local hiring commitments or infrastructure development.
- equity participation in projects.

EXAMPLE

Iberdrola's Convive programme[64]

Community benefits programmes can significantly increase local support for new infrastructure. A survey conducted in the UK found that 43% of rural voters would support local renewable energy projects without any community benefit offer, but a further 37% say that they would only support the projects conditional on community benefits.[65] Therefore, a scheme that came with community benefit would secure much broader overall support. However, the nature of these benefits, and the transfer mechanisms, are as important as their scale.

Community benefits need to be **fair, direct** and **simple, and tailored to address the needs and priorities of the affected populations**. It is important that they are transferred directly to the community so that they should have agency over how they are deployed. They should also be explicitly agreed, regulated and monitored to ensure transparency and delivery.[66]

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[63] *Quote from the SSE interview.*

[64] *Iberdrola. Convive Programme. Retrieved from [https://www.iberdrola.com/about-us/our-company/renewable-energies/convive-programme].*

[65] *Richardson, J.,Hammond, N., Luke, A., & Bunt, P. (2023). "Power to the People How to unlock energy infrastructure by securing community support". UKOnward. Retrieved from [Power-to-the-People-Final-Final-Final.pdf (ukonward.com)]*

[66] *Ibid.*

5.2 Why we need a typology of community benefits

Robust and efficient community engagement allows host communities to engage in negotiations with renewable energy developers, enhancing the acceptance of renewable energy projects.[67] Therefore, delineating these benefits clearly and structuring projects throughout their lifecycle to align with them constitutes a pivotal aspect of the energy transition and its societal acceptance. Academic and grey literature both emphasise the need for community benefits to address distributive justice and fairness objectives, encompassing both monetary and non-monetary considerations of citizens, to be truly effective.[68]

The typology of community benefits presented below was drafted by the authors drawing on various publicly available sources, including general good practice guidelines,[69,70,71] region-specific examples,[72,73] company case studies and examples[74,75,76,77] and interview data. It is intended to serve as a valuable resource for project developers and community leaders by providing insights into what they can offer or request during the developmental phase of the project. However, structural factors, such as utility type, existing community plans, and the interplay between state and local governments, can significantly influence the benefit sharing strategies a community can pursue.

5.3 Economic benefits

New investment and business opportunities: These projects stimulate local economies by attracting investments, encouraging innovation, and providing opportunities for local businesses to participate in the supply chain. Renewable electricity developers can commit to using (as much as feasible) local materials and labour during the construction phase. They can also request or oblige their subcontractor to do the same.

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[67] *van den Berg, K., & Tempels, B. (2022). The role of community benefits in community acceptance of multifunctional solar farms in the Netherlands. Land Use Policy, 122, 106344. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2022.106344.*

Vuichard, P., Stauch, A., & Dällenbach, N. (2019). Individual or collective? Community investment, local taxes, and the social acceptance of wind energy in Switzerland. Energy Research & Social Science, 58, 101275. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.101275

Lennon, B., Dunphy, N.P., & Sanvicente, E. (2019). Community acceptability and the energy transition: a citizens' perspective. Energy, Sustainability and Society, 9(1), 35. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13705-019-0218-z

[68] *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf

Roddis, P., Carver, S., Dallimer, M., Norman, P., & Ziv, G. (2018). The role of community acceptance in planning outcomes for onshore wind and solar farms: An energy justice analysis. Applied Energy, 226, 353-364. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2018.05.087.

Jørgensen, M. L., Anker, H. T., & Lassen, J. (2020). Distributive fairness and local acceptance of wind turbines: The role of compensation schemes. Energy Policy, 138, 111294. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2020.111294.

[69] *BRE. N Waters, O Pendered and G Hartnell (2015) Community Engagement Good Practice Guidance for Solar Farms. Retrieved from [https://files.bregroup.com/bre-co-uk-file-library-copy/filelibrary/pdf/Brochures/BRE-NSC_Good-Practice-Guide.pdf]*

[70] *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

[71] *World Economic Forum. (2023, December). Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Using_a_People_positive_Approach_to_Accelerate_the_Scale_up_of_Clean_Power_2023.pdf*

[72] *Victoria State Government. (2021, July) Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development: A Guide for Renewable Energy Developers. Retrieved from [https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0025/621970/community-engagement-and-benefit-sharing-in-renewable-energy-development.pdf]*

[73] *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. (2021, December) Community Engagement and Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments: good practice guidance for England. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b87e3b8fa8f50384489ccb/community-engagement-and-benefits-from-onshore-wind.pdf]*

[74] *SSE Renewables. (2023) Community investment reviews. Retrieved from [https://www.sserenewables.com/communities/community-investment-reviews/]*

[75] *Ørsted. A Just Energy Transition to Help Communities Thrive. Retrieved from Ørsted. A Just Energy Transition to Help Communities Thrive. Retrieved from [https://orsted.com/en/who-we-are/sustainability/green-transformation-that-works-for-people/thriving-communities]*

[76] *EDP. Empowering our Communities. Retrieved from [https://www.edp.com/en/sustainability/empower-our-communities#investimentosocial]*

[77] *EDP. The Community Fund. Retrieved from [https://www.edf-re.uk/working-with-communities/the-community-fund/]*

Additional tax revenue: RE projects offer a long-term, recession-proof source of local tax revenue, which can be directed to education, libraries, hospitals, etc. with limited added burden on municipal services (police, emergency services, sewer, schools, water).

Growing demand for local goods and services: During the construction phase, benefits can accrue to multiple local businesses such as gas stations, restaurants, and grocery stores.

Additional income / revenue diversification opportunity for landowners: For projects where land is leased from residents in a targeted area, these agreements offer steady, reliable income that enable landowners to diversify their cash flow through means that are less vulnerable to extreme heat and drought than many cash crops. Leasing land can be an attractive option for farmers who have land that cannot be cultivated or used for pastoral farming.[78] Alternatively, renewable electricity production can be co-located and integrated with agricultural activity, improving the production potential of both subsystems through 'agrivoltaic' practices.[79]

Community funds: Renewable energy developers can set up Community Funds when establishing a new project. These funds deliver annual payments by the company to the local community to spend according to their priorities. The payments to the funds typically depend on the size of the wind farm or solar plant, how much energy it produces, and how much profit it generates. Such funds are already widely used by several large energy companies to share benefits to communities in the areas where they operate.

Utilising community funds to enhance local wellbeing: Financial resources delivered through community funds can be directed at different types of projects to improve the local environment, services, opportunities for social participation, or the energy transition. For example, funds can be deployed to support electric community vehicles, insulation for households in fuel poverty, or new and innovative approaches to agriculture. In Scotland, community funds from renewable electricity projects have supported service and infrastructure improvements, including public toilets, community centre renovations, and refurbishment of sports facilities. Some communities have also used community funds to support extracurricular activities for young people, services for chronically ill residents, and to help households cope with the increased cost of living.[80]

Reduced energy costs: Renewable energy projects can contribute to stable or even lower energy costs for communities, as they rely on freely available sources of energy like sunlight or wind, reducing vulnerability to fluctuating fossil fuel prices. Some renewable electricity project developers are also willing to provide lower rates for local residents if these are negotiated during the planning phase.

5.4 Social benefits

Job creation: Renewable energy projects create many new jobs, especially during the construction phase. Although the jobs in construction are temporary in nature, a smaller number of permanent jobs is also created in maintenance and operation.

Some renewable energy companies are keen to maximise the community benefits by proactively offering to fill a certain share of the emerging jobs with local workers or prioritise local workers through upskilling. Communities can also request this, or for the project developer to provide internships and other opportunities for local people.

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[78] *The Guardian. (2023, December 27). Uruguay's green power revolution: rapid shift to wind shows the world how it's done. Retrieved from [https://amp.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/dec/27/uruguays-green-power-revolution-rapid-shift-to-wind-shows-the-world-how-its-done]*

[79] *PV Magazine (5 July 2022) 'Italy publishes new national guidelines for agrovoltaic plants'. Retrieved from [https://www.pv-magazine.com/2022/07/05/italy-publishes-new-national-guidelines-for-agrovoltaic-plants/]*

[80] *SSE Renewables. (2023) Community investment reviews. Retrieved from [https://www.sserenewables.com/communities/community-investment-reviews/]*

The permanent jobs in operations and maintenance positions, although smaller in number than the temporary jobs in construction, can be crucial in enabling young people to find local employment and stay in the area, thus preventing population decline in rural areas.[81] Directing emerging job opportunities to vulnerable community members can also maximise social benefits, deliver equitable outcomes, and enhance access to employment for individuals who face disadvantages in the labour market.

Educational opportunities: Renewable energy projects can offer educational opportunities for community members through 'open days', guided tours and workshops focused on renewable energy technologies, creating a more informed populace.

Reduced health risks: By decreasing air and water pollution, renewable energy projects, vwhen sited carefully,[82] can contribute to improved public health by reducing the prevalence of respiratory diseases and other health issues associated with fossil fuel emissions.[83] This impact is particularly significant in communities that were previously engaged in fossil fuel production, such as coal mining or the operation of a coal power plant, or were dependent on using oil or coal for heating or cooking.

Energy security / reduced exposure to price spikes: Local renewable energy sources, especially when coupled with electrification, can reduce reliance on fossil fuel imports and make communities more resilient during emergencies or disruptions in the energy supply chain. Local ownership or shareholding schemes can maximise this benefit, allowing households or communities to partner with project developers and generate revenue from the project.

5.5 Environmental benefits

Nature restoration: Environmental enhancements, improvements to the local environment through nature-positive operating practices to achieve a net biodiversity gain.

Biodiversity improvements: Renewable energy developers can choose to engage in biodiversity restoration, or they may be subject to biodiversity enhancement obligations. Biodiversity improvements can include various activities, such as (but not limited to): wildlife tracking, peatland restoration, activities to make the environment more favourable for certain native wildlife species, and erosion prevention.[84]

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81 *Climate Action Network Europe. (2023, October). Guidelines to Faster and Fairer Permitting for Europe's Renewable Energy Transition. Retrieved from [https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2023/10/Fairer-and-Faster-permitting_CAN-Europe-Briefing.pdf]*

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82 *Kiesecker, J, et al. (2019) "Hitting the target but missing the mark: Unintended environmental consequences of the Paris Climate Agreement." Frontiers in Environmental Science, vol. 7, 9 Oct. 2019, https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2019.00151.*

83 *CAN Europe. (2016). Co-benefits of Climate Action: Assessing Turkey's Climate Pledge. Retrieved from https://caneurope.org/content/uploads/2016/10/Co-benefits-Turkey-EN.pdf*

84 *EDF Renewables. The benefits to our communities. Retrieved from [https://www.edf-re.uk/working-with-communities/]*

Section 6: Conclusions and recommendations

In the context of accelerating renewable energy deployment, securing broad public support for these projects is imperative. As shown in this white paper, these projects hold the promise of numerous benefits for individuals, communities, the environment, and investing companies. However, within the current policy framework, these advantages are not automatic or evenly distributed.

To actualise the benefits that renewable energy projects can deliver, and to ensure their equitable distribution, there is a need to develop:

- a structured process to identify and understand community concerns related to renewable energy projects;
- a framework for various stakeholders to collectively devise strategies that address community concerns, facilitate equitable implementation and decision-making, and optimise positive community outcomes;
- a set of consistent, coherent and shared standards for community engagement and benefit sharing across the EU;
- mechanisms that incentivise high community engagement standards, along with biodiversity ones, as non-price criteria in renewable energy auctions. This will ensure a fair playing field and boost the competitiveness of developers with comprehensive community engagement plans and strategies;
- regulations that assign responsibility for safeguarding community interests to renewable energy developers and different levels of government, instead of individual communities;
- concrete metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) for community engagement outcomes and benefit sharing to enable governments and community representatives to compare the performance of different projects and project developers. These data will also enhance reporting and subsequent accountability by establishing measurable standards; and
- digital platforms where community benefits can be seen accruing in real time. These could encourage project developers as well as community leaders to identify best ways to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes. They would also enable communities that have no experience of renewable energy projects to make informed decisions.

To deliver on the needs identified above - and to ensure that renewable energy projects are developed in collaboration with the affected communities in a way that takes into consideration their concerns and interests - there are certain actions that various stakeholders ought to take.

Policymakers and governments should:

- **provide stability and certainty** by establishing a clear, strong and coherent policy approach that addresses the rights, expectations, and perspectives of project-affected communities.
- **encourage, and ideally mandate, robust community consultation and community benefit-sharing arrangements.** These should be codified so that energy developers have clarity on the legal requirements. Aligning legal requirements across jurisdictions would provide clarity to companies that operate in many different areas and enable them to use the same process plans and guidelines in multiple contexts. Standardised requirements would facilitate the sharing of resources among local authorities to build capacity on how to support affected communities. This would be particularly valuable to local authorities in areas where a lot of new development is taking place, such as in RAAs.
- **adopt robust biodiversity and community engagement standards as non-price criteria in renewable auctions** at the European level.

- provide specific guidance or binding regulation regarding **the priorities that should drive community benefit-sharing arrangements.** Government policy must ensure that benefit-sharing arrangements are not used as a method to secure a social license to operate without addressing the adverse impacts that a project may generate. It is within the remit of national governments to require companies to offer local ownership quotas or other financial mechanisms to empower local residents, businesses, and communities. These offers should not be discretionary, especially in the RAAs. Governments could also develop regional guidance documents on the local specificities that developers need to consider when engaging locals.
- **support capacity building and provide legal assistance to communities**, to ensure that they are not unduly burdened by needing to deal with multiple project developers, or placed in a position where they lack capacity to safeguard their own interests. This is particularly important to ensure that meaningful community engagement is not prevented due to engagement fatigue in areas where a lot of renewable energy project development takes place, such as RAAs. While community engagement is not mandatory during project development and design stages, particularly in RAAs, it can deliver significant value for renewable project developers and the affected communities. Hence, based on the rationale provided in Sections 2 and 3 of this report, community engagement should become a standard practice among renewable energy developers, ideally following the good practice guidelines outlined in Section 4.
- **ensure that communities have access to legal support during the community engagement process, and effective and accessible grievance mechanisms** such as Ombudsmen or oversight committee (or mechanisms within local authorities) that empower communities to bring forward complaints regarding the operation of energy projects and any community benefit-sharing arrangements.
- **support 'a race to the top'** by shifting away from focus on price as the key bid evaluation criteria in renewable energy auctions to include social and environmental criteria, such as the creation of a local industry, the environmental impacts of a project, or its local/social acceptability.

Businesses in the energy sector could mainstream good practice by:

- **collaborating to establish and adopt industry-wide best practices for community engagement and benefit sharing.** There are currently very few codified requirements or minimum standards in place that apply across jurisdictions. As a result, processes for community engagement and benefit sharing are disparate and voluntary, based on each company's moral compass, available resources, and business discretions – as well as the resources that each community has at their disposal to protect their own interests. This approach risks 'a race to the bottom' rather than 'a race to the top', as companies compete for best sites and government contracts.
- **embedding system value – i.e., actions that benefits society, the economy, and the environment - into company strategies across the board.** A top-down mandate acknowledging that system value enhances business value is necessary and would support a more widespread adoption of new approaches that will enable a just and equitable energy transition at faster pace.

Third sector organisations can act as knowledge brokers or community liaisons. Academic literature (as well as learnings from practice) underscores that having trusted mediators can sometimes mitigate lack of trust in certain stakeholders (such as political organisations or energy companies). Therefore, NGOs and civil society organisations, especially those embedded locally, can fill this gap.

In the context of accelerating renewable energy deployment to address the climate emergency, garnering broad public support for these projects is crucial. This white paper illustrates the numerous benefits that renewable energy projects can offer for households, communities, the environment, and the investing companies.

However, the uneven distribution of these advantages within the current policy framework highlights the urgent need for proactive measures to ensure equitable access to the benefits of renewable energy projects. Governments, policymakers, businesses, and non-governmental organisations must all take decisive action to accelerate effective community engagement and benefit-sharing practices. It is only through the implementation of these strategies that renewable energy companies can earn a social license to operate in a fair and equitable manner. By addressing community concerns, minimising negative impacts, and maximising benefits through transparent distribution, projects can foster mutual understanding and optimise outcomes for all stakeholders involved. Community engagement remains pivotal in this process, serving as the cornerstone for identifying local concerns and achieving shared success in the renewable energy transition.

Annex A – Methodology

In addition to wider academic and industry literature, the project team reviewed good practice guidelines and codes of good conduct from a variety of different sources including publications by governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academic publications and energy companies' own publicly available resources. (summarised in the table below).

Data sourced from published literature was complemented by qualitative insights gained through interviews conducted exclusively for this project. Additionally, certain unpublished materials used by energy companies for internal purposes, were confidentially shared with researchers during the interview process.

Table 2: *Compendium of good practice guidelines*

Title	Author	Date	Case Studies Inlcuded	Organization
Community Engagement and Benefits from Onshore Wind	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy	Dec 2021	Yes	UK Government
Enabling Framework for Renewables		Dec 2023		European Commission
Good Practice Principles for Community Benefits Offshore Renewable Energy Developments	Energy and Climate Change Directorate	Nov 2018	Yes	Scottish Government
Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing in Renewable Energy Development	T Lane, and J Hicks.	2017	Yes	Victoria State Government
Community Engagement and Equity in Renewable Energy Projects: A Literature Review	Paty Romero-Lankao, Nicole Rosner, Rebecca A. Efroymson, Esther S. Parisch,Lis Blanco, Sharon Smolinski, and Keith Kline	2023		National Renewable Energy Laboratory
Renewable Energy Zones Toolkit				Greening the Grid
Participation in Just Transition				Öko-Institut e.V.
BRE NSC Good Practice Guide	Nicola Waters, Primrose Solar and Ollie Pendered, Community Energy South	2015	Yes	BRE National Solar Centre
Wind Industry Commitments on Community Engagement		2020	Yes	WindEurope
RGI ACER EU Statement Engagement				Renewables Grid Initiative

RES Best Practices Factsheet 5.0	Cosimo Tansini, Erica Gentili, Nicoleta Lipcaneanu	May 2023	Yes	European Environmental Bureau
Using a People-positive Approach to Accelerate the Scale-up of Clean Power	Shwetha Jadhav and Irene Varoli	Dec 2023	Yes	World Economic Forum
Code of Good Practice for Renewable Energy in Romania	Aurel, Adina, Dăduț, Radu, Dumitru, Sorina, Jardine, Bryan, Negoescu, Flavia, Negoită, Irina	2021		Romanian Wind Energy Association
Community Engagement and Benefits for Onshore Wind in England	Nicky Hodges, Karen Smith, Dr Sarah Becker, and Keith Hempshall	Dec 2021	Yes	Centre for Sustainable Energy (Duplicate)
Fairer and Faster Permitting CAN Europe Briefing	Veerle Dossche, Seda Orhan (CAN Europe) and John Szabo (Eclareon)	Oct 2023	Yes	Climate Action Network Europe
How to engage stakeholders for powerful and inclusive climate action planning	C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, C40 Knowledge Hub	Dec 2023		C40 Cities
Community Energy Planning: Best Practices and Lessons Learned in NREL's Work with Communities	Liz Ross and Megan Day	Aug 2022	Yes	National Renewable Energy Laboratory and Joint Institute for Strategic Energy Analysis
Wind Farms Community Engagement Good Practice Review	Dr Mhairi Aitken, Dr Claire Haggett & Dr David Rudolph	June 2016	Yes	The University of Edinburgh
Community Benefit Sharing and Renewable Energy and Green Hydrogen Projects: Policy Guidance for Governments	Perrine Toledano, Chris Albin-Lackey, Maria Diez Andres, Martin Dietrich Brauch	Sep 2023	Yes	Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment
The Community Fund				EDF Renewables UK
Community Investment Reviews		2023		SSE Renewables
Stakeholder Management Approach		Nov 2013		EDP
Thriving Communities		2023		Ørsted

Topic guide for interviews:

This is a reference topic guide for internal use by the CISL team. The main questions were edited or combined in the interest of time over the course of the interviews. Additionally, each interview had additional questions tailored to the specific companies based on the publicly available data about their community engagement strategies researched by the project team in preparation for the interview.

1. Why is community engagement important in renewable energy projects?

- What is the need for it?
- What are the advantages (could be social, economic, political, cultural, legal or a combination of these)
- What aspects of renewable energy projects does it particularly facilitate?
- Are there any disadvantages?

2. What types of community engagement strategies have you come across in your work?

- Do there exist different classifications or typologies?
- What are the best practices? Are there any industry guidelines that we can look into?
- What are the things to avoid?

3. Can you think of case studies/examples where community engagement has helped realise the benefits of RE projects (whether from your own organisation or any that you have come across your work)?

- Which ones were particularly successful in achieving their objectives? And why?
- Which ones were less successful? And why?

4. What are the main benefits communities can gain from RE projects?

- Are there different kinds and duration?
- Why are these benefits important?

5. How can we use engagement strategies to ensure benefits reach targeted communities?

6. Contextual factors surrounding community engagement?

- What factors are inhibiting (or have inhibited) community engagement? (consider social, economic, political, cultural, legal et al)
- What factors may facilitate or promote it?
- What would be your action recommendations for different stakeholders in this regard. The following is an indicative classification but please feel free to use another
    - Policy makers
    - Governmental bodies (local, regional or national)
    - Businesses/Energy companies
    - Civil society and NGO's (including third sector and social economy organisations such as cooperatives, mutual organisation, trade unions et al)

7. Can you reflect on (insert company's name) approach to community engagement and your key learnings from it?

- Why was it conceived as such?
- What differentiates it from other organisations?
- What are the learnings from adopting it and how has it been fine-tuned as your programming has developed?

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The Nature Conservancy

Enabling a Community-Powered Energy Transition:

Good practices for engaging stakeholders, fostering collaboration, and promoting socioeconomic benefits

The Nature Conservancy, March 2024