



PRACTICE NOTE

COMMITTING TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

LEARNING EVENT INSIGHTS

DEEPENING REIPPPP'S COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IMPACT

In partnership with:



Supporters:

What can, and must, be learned to improve community development in the REIPPPP, the largest renewable energy programme ever undertaken in South Africa?

This was the question that 150 diverse participants came together to explore at a dedicated Learning Event in early 2020. The event was funded by USAID, in partnership with the IPP Office, and supported by the industry associations SAWEA and SAPVIA, and was hosted at the IDC in Johannesburg. This practice note is one of six compiled by a group dedicated to recording the day's rich discussions, and captures insights related to the specific important theme of **community engagement**.

THE CHALLENGE

The REIPPPP framework allows for a high degree of flexibility in the way companies build and maintain relationships with host communities and beneficiaries. On the plus side, this allows for context-specific and fit-for-purpose community development. What can be more challenging is that such work is iterative, long term, and ultimately about human relationships. Companies, communities and relevant government stakeholders have to go on a journey together, where the dynamics mature and change with each interaction. Unsurprisingly, trust is key.

Building and maintaining trusted relationships across diverse stakeholders demands careful and consistent work. This nurturing is even more crucial in the contexts where most independent power producers (IPPs) involved in the REIPPPP find themselves, which experience poverty, inequality and historical as well as current societal trauma

and injustice. Given these high stakes, relationships between companies and communities can become strained as a result of relatively simple mistakes or oversights made in planning and implementing engagements. For example, the IPP company may have chosen a venue for a meeting that is difficult to reach, or set it up at a time of day when childcare or transport in the community is not available, or used English to communicate instead of the predominant local language. Less obvious, but equally important, dynamics can shape these relationships; for example, if there is existing friction between traditional leadership and political leadership or competing forums.

Community engagement practitioners therefore have their work cut out for them in this environment and need to work within a complex relationship landscape with keen awareness and understanding.





NEW INSIGHTS

Ideas we need to let go

- **One entity is 'leading' the engagement.** There are, in reality, constant shifts in power. Our engagements need to reflect a collaborative mindset that navigates and mediates these dynamics in an ethical and responsible manner.

- **We are bringing the solutions.** It must be understood and respected that there are existing ecosystems that already work within host communities. Paternalistic or patronising practices are therefore not appropriate, and IPPs are not here to 'rescue' anybody. Often there is no need for a 'new' idea per se, and some projects can cluster community assets or add value to government interventions, strengthening the existing system. The best way to identify these opportunities is for communities to share their perspectives, not to have others' perspectives imposed upon them.

- **Leaning on people we find it easier to work with.** If we limit ourselves to working with particular individuals or groups, we limit our understanding of the wider opportunities for impact. IPPs need to engage with all types of stakeholders. This involves having the resilience not to take things personally, even if something goes wrong, and rather to understand that community engagement is a human interactive process demanding far more than a compliance mindset.

*Insights that **disrupt** and **liberate** our thinking*

- **The power of a consistent, transparent, and honest communication process.** This builds trust with a community, is vital in minimising conflict, and is also the best way to limit unrealistic expectations before projects are implemented. Furthermore, it helps to sustain buy-in even when things inevitably don't go according to plan at some stage or another. Openness in communication encourages openness to adjustments.

- **A clearly articulated shared vision of what different actors want to achieve.** This type of shared and collaborative engagement empowers community leadership, improving the relationship significantly. Importantly, it also fosters accountability among all actors when they know what is envisaged, by whom, for whom, and for what higher aim.

- **We have a rich and varied body of grounded experience.** Over the last nine years of the REIPPPP, we have accumulated a vast library of experiences of successes and failures that can serve as a rich source for learning and exchange.

- **Community development is a professional practice.** It is a discipline that is informed by a particular understanding of community and development, and it demands particular skills and passion. This means that it cannot be 'just anybody' in charge of this work, and resources must be put into building the necessary capacity both at company level and in giving support to communities. Community Development Practice demands that the fundamentals of participatory development are done well; so, to avoid causing damage, IPPs must be open to seeking support to develop this capacity and to make any necessary changes.



RECOMMENDATIONS

*Actions for **local or community** impact*

- **Avoid ‘double-dipping’.** What with a government presence, several IPPs, and other community development interventions all working in the same region, we need to ensure that interventions compliment and support one another, without replacing or duplicating efforts. Open communication, shared forums and co-created research can help to streamline these multi-lateral undertakings.
- **A commitment from all within the ecosystem.** Having a shared commitment ensures sustainable development efforts that benefit communities and contribute to societal change. Part of this commitment involves a constant questioning about how to optimise benefits for communities over time.
- **Step back, re-group and re-strategise with community leadership.** Even when good engagement and development is taking place, we need to make the time to reflect on our collaboration process with stakeholders, both to celebrate successes and to ensure learning and improvement.

*Actions for **national** impact*

- **Empower community members.** Community members are not passive recipients and can in fact become powerful agents of change once they learn what the processes and procedures are, as well as why and how they can benefit.
- **Report on quality, not just quantity.** The sort of impact achieved through community engagement is qualitative and must be described, not simply counted. For example, on the matter of job creation, the number of jobs can better be understood in light of such questions as: Is the employment short term or long term? Is it dignified? This will give a clearer picture of the impact made.
- **Nurture developmental practices in the company.** Prioritising how community development is understood throughout the company is vital. The board and other key decision-makers must grasp that the social licence it brings is well worth any investment in community engagement skills development.



FURTHER READING

- **[International – Planning Toolkit]**
The State of Queensland, Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning. 2017. Community engagement toolkit for planning Available online: <https://planning.dilgp.qld.gov.au>.
- **[International – Planning Toolkit]**
Community Places. 2014. Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement. Available online: www.communityplanningtoolkit.org
- **[International – Workbook and Toolbox]**
Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industries. Effective Community Engagement Workbook Version 2. Available online: <https://aese.psu.edu/research/centers/cecd/engagement-toolbox/planning/worksheets/CommEngageWorkbook.pdf>
- **[International – Discussion Paper]**
International Finance Corporation. 2019. A Guide to Community Engagement for Public-Private Partnerships. IFC World Bank Draft Discussion Paper. Available online: <https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/sites/ppp.worldbank.org/files/2019-10/A%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Engagement%20for%20Public-Private%20Partnerships%20-%20Draft%20Discussion%20June%202019.pdf>

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