

Co-Own Energy Futures



What is RE Co Own?

In the pursuit of a socially just and resilient renewable energy system in the Philippines, the Responsible Energy Initiative (REI), a cohort of over 50 multi-sectoral participants - developers, civil society organisations, financiers and procurers has identified meaningful community engagement as key to transforming the Filipino renewable energy (RE) system. Renewable energy projects in the Philippines often face issues in implementation and/or fail to deliver promised benefits when host communities and other impacted stakeholders are not meaningfully involved in the planning, design, operation or management of the project. Not only are communities harmfully impacted by gaps in involvement, but the long-term viability of RE projects is also likely to be compromised due to the increased risk of significant delays due to community opposition. This, in turn, fuels perceptions of RE's ineffectiveness for electricity production, distribution and thus threatens to slow the Philippine's trajectory towards a clean energy transition.

In response to this challenge, the REI cohort formed a workstream that led to the design of Co-Ownership of Energy Futures (Co-Own). Co-Own is a model of collaboration between different stakeholders within an RE project (developers, communities, financiers) that ensures equitable benefits-sharing and democratic involvement within the preliminary, implementation and maintenance stages of an RE system. Its emphasis is on fostering shared risk, shared reward and shared responsibility among the stakeholders. While there are examples of co-ownership models being trialled in other geographies, there have been no cohesive attempts at creating a tried and tested set of co-ownership principles and processes that can be applied in a utility-scale context within the Philippines, to scale.

The REI cohort believes that Co-Own is an intervention that has the potential to shift relationship dynamics within the RE development process to an equitable, accountable, rights-based, inclusive and democratic RE system. The project consists of 2 stages to develop a prototype of co-ownership trialled within the Filipino context:

- (1) Creating a guidebook of co-ownership principles that fit the local context, based on research within local and international case studies
- (2) Piloting the model as a prototype that can demonstrate the "art of the possible" for scaling across the system. These two stages are in dialogue with one another, where learnings from the research will influence the pilot and lessons from the pilot will shape the guidebook.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

What does Co-ownership look like?

From a year of landscape analysis through expert, multi-stakeholder input from the REI cohort and further research into existing case studies of community ownership (to derive inspiration from in forming principles for co-ownership), the Co-Own team has sought to define what co-ownership might look like within the Filipino context - specific to the needs and opportunities present within the local system.

Co-ownership puts democratization at its heart. The agency of communities and all stakeholders within it should be recognized and shared with RE developers and other duty-bearers and process holders of an RE system.

Co-ownership should be an expansion from community ownership, that challenges any uneven power dynamics between developers and communities - creating a system that empowers everyone. Through the negotiation of community ownership models, the aim is to transform relationships with RE developers towards an RE system that is co-created, co-managed, as well as driving shared access and benefits.

Co-ownership is anchored in trust-building that effectively enhances engagement and solutions identification among stakeholders. Co-ownership aims to address polarized dynamics and antagonistic narratives between developers, communities, and other stakeholder groups within the RE system. Transparency is central to building trust and fostering new dynamics between and among these stakeholders.

Co-ownership is regenerative in both process and outcome, going far beyond compliance. It puts sustainability and futures thinking at its core, responding to shocks in the system and identifying new opportunities for unlocking mutual benefits. Its approach is centered on fostering the ability to learn, adapt and become resilient.

EQUITABLE

"Who benefits?"

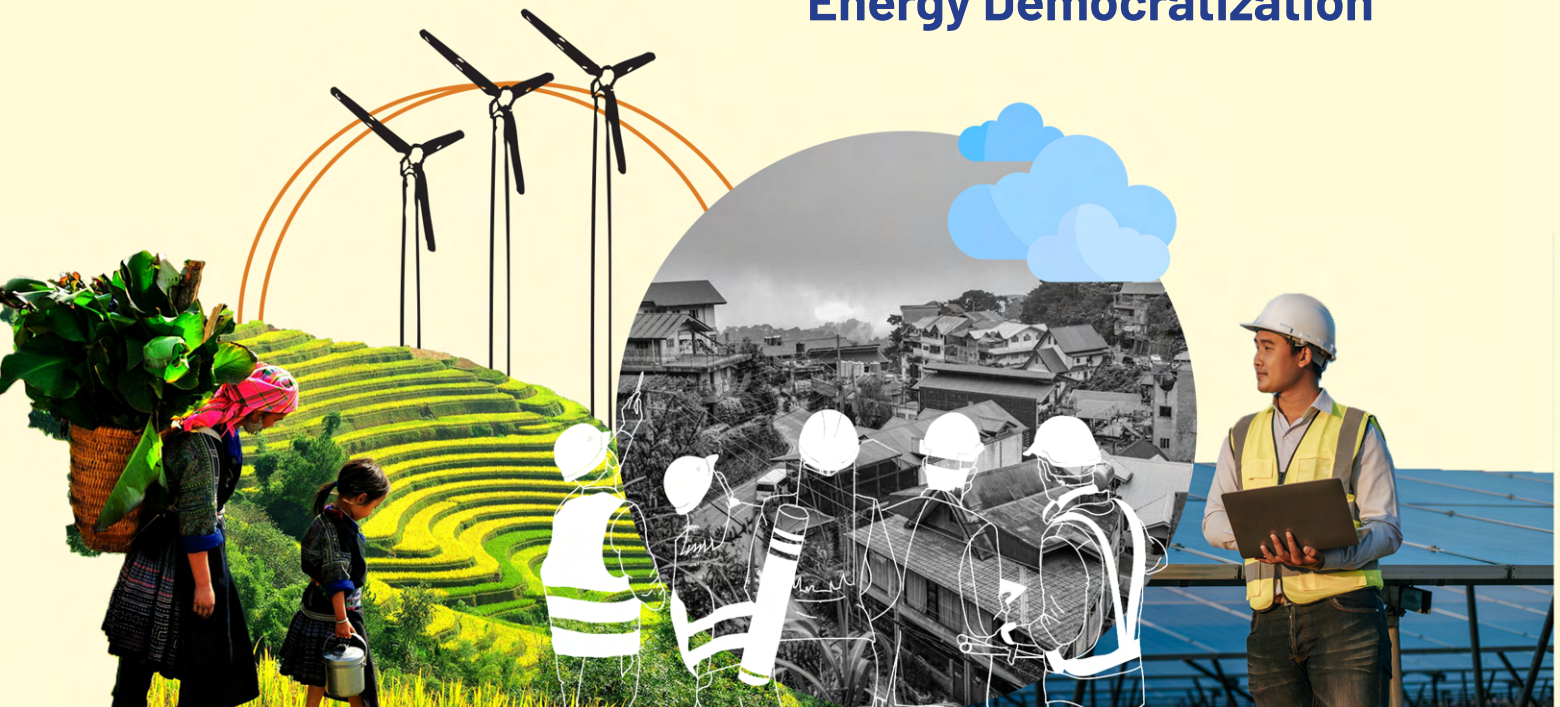
DEMOCRATIC

"Who decides?"

RESILIENT

"How will we act toward the planet and future generations?"

Building Blocks to Energy Democratization



MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Meaningful community engagement is fundamentally characterized by ownership, democratic management, and the realization of tangible shared benefits, which directly incentivizes joint long-term stewardship. The Malaya Farmers Agriculture Cooperative (MFAC) in Camarines Norte is a prime example, where savings from the solar facility and earnings from cash-for-work farmland development were immediately converted into capital for their organizations, directly linking the RE system's presence to socio-economic benefits and strengthening the community's commitment to its sustainability. Similarly, the Vergara Magtu-od Development Cooperative (VEMADECO) and the micro-hydro project run by TTriMPA in Mindanao demonstrate that when communities directly own and manage their systems, they ensure both reliable electricity access and the necessary protection of associated natural resources. This collective, rights-based approach, rooted in democracy and equity, is essential for ensuring the RE system truly serves local needs and maintains its sustainability.

IMPROVING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

An improved policy environment enables a just, regenerative, and scalable RE transition by removing barriers and fostering local government support for community-led initiatives. The success of the Vergara Magtu-od Development Cooperative (VEMADECO), for instance, has gained the full support of the Local Government Unit (LGU) and the National Electrification Administration (NEA) for a connectivity upgrade to the grid, which signifies a positive shift in public sector investment toward community-initiated projects. In Labo, Camarines Norte, the achievements of the Malaya Farmers Agriculture Cooperative (MFAC) led to a formal commitment from the municipal government to invest in local RE infrastructure, establish a municipal Just Energy Transition Council, and finance vital access road construction. This demonstrates that grassroots achievements can be leveraged to advocate for and secure policy and financial commitments from local authorities, thereby creating a supportive, rights-based, and accountable environment for community-powered RE development.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building is crucial for community self-reliance and the sustainability of decentralized RE systems, encompassing technical skills, organizational management, and policy advocacy. In the case of the Sabah RE2 Roadmap 2040 project, technical training was prioritized to enable the community to handle day-to-day operations and maintenance, alongside establishing a community energy management committee for governance and financial oversight. For the Malaya Farmers Agriculture Cooperative (MFAC), the RE installation spurred a broader capacity to strengthen their social enterprise, leading to the development of internal policies for maximizing savings and capital formation. Groups like ALPAS Homeowners Association in the SINAG Homes microgrid take on specific administrative roles, such as managing the prepaid card loading system, showing how capacity building translates into practical, decentralized management of the energy system's commercial aspects.