

# Communicating Decentralised Renewable Energy to Financiers and Senior Policymakers

A Guide for Campaigners and Non-Governmental Organisations



## Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach is Europe's leading specialist in climate change communication, bridging the gap between research and practice. Our charity is focused on building cross-societal acceptance of the need to tackle climate change. We have over 13 years of experience helping organisations communicate about climate change in ways that resonate with the values, sense of identity and worldview of their audiences. We work with a wide range of partners including central, regional and local governments, charities, business, faith organisations and youth groups.

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## Hivos

Hivos is an international organisation that seeks new solutions to persistent global issues. Hivos works towards a green society that has no expiry date and is powered by renewable energy. This is important for the climate, the global economy and our health. We make new forms of energy like biogas available for poor people in remote areas and stimulate governments and businesses to invest in the energy of the future.

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# Contents



Introduction	4
Executive summary	5
The audiences and their values	8
DRE means different things to different people	13
Metanarrative 1: Opportunity frames	16
Metanarrative 2: Scale	21
Metanarrative 3: Climate change	23
Metanarrative 4: New stories and new communicators	24
Metanarrative 5: Addressing the major challenges facing investors	26
Non-Governmental Organisations - dos and don'ts	27
Methodology	30
References	31

# Introduction

In July 2017, Hivos, a leading Dutch development Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), invited Climate Outreach to explore language and narratives around Decentralised Renewable Energy (DRE) that could engage and build support with stakeholders in businesses, investors, government development agencies, Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), and private finance. This report is therefore written specifically for people working in the non-governmental development and environment sectors.

Hivos was concerned that these sectors all show strong interest in DRE but had shown a lack of action or ambition. It therefore invited Climate Outreach to *“develop a new, bold(er), more provocative narrative and communication strategy that inspires our target audiences to prioritise and take action to increase access to green & inclusive energy.”*

Our recommendations are all based on evidence from multiple sources: a synthesis of peer-reviewed research, and structured and scripted interviews with ten key figures from inside (or working with) these audiences.

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Effective engagement requires communicators to recognise and reflect the worldview of their target audience. Attempts by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to project their own motivations are rarely successful (and were consistently criticised in our interviews). In this report we have therefore sought to find language that accurately reflects the values and motivations reported by people from these audiences.

We recognise that some of this language may be challenging for NGOs and campaigners – especially those with a critique of globalisation, capitalism, and free markets. This is not surprising: part of the failure to communicate with these groups has originated from major differences in values and identity.

For this reason, this report is not a toolkit. Rather it is best treated as a rich source of material from which NGOs can construct new language and reshape their strategies. We are confident that there is enough common ground for all sectors to establish productive partnerships.

This report is the first of its kind and will hopefully lead to further, more detailed research.

# Executive summary

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## Key findings

Effective communications requires reflecting and responding to different audiences, and tailoring messaging to the values of each audience.

NGOs and financiers have different values and therefore use different narratives, often with entirely different vocabularies. Policymakers – especially those in government and multilateral development agencies – tend to sit between the two sectors, adopting some of the NGO concerns about social equality but with language that is primarily grounded in business and finance.

There are also differences within stakeholder groups: differences among financiers based on their organisational mandate, and among policymakers depending on their national culture and political systems. All messaging should be designed and tested for specific audiences.

There was no agreed shared definition of DRE, or whether it is “distributed” or “decentralised,” or whether it is on, off, or alongside the grid. Financiers and policymakers assume that effective implementation of DRE will inevitably be a compromise that complements and sometimes runs in parallel to existing centralised and fossil fuel systems. They often criticise NGOs for being too purist and not recognising the value of a mosaic of emerging solutions.

Financiers and policymakers are motivated by maximising growth and revenue first, development second. Financiers are concerned about reaching people in need, but only if there is a strong business case. They welcome additional funding and aid to help them reach “the last mile” but believe this will only ultimately happen at large-scale through free enterprise and market competition.

All audiences are motivated by seeing DRE in situ, by case studies, and by hearing the personal stories of people who have built and funded it – especially the entrepreneurs on the ground.

## Language and narratives that work

The following keywords appeared repeatedly in interviews (and relatively rarely in NGO materials) and represent the language needed to speak effectively with these audiences.

Keyword	Application
<b>Opportunity</b>	DRE provides opportunities at all levels, for local communities, suppliers, installers and financiers.
<b>Enterprise</b>	DRE enables enterprise and a new generation of local and national entrepreneurs.
<b>Transformation</b>	DRE is a transformative technology that will change the entire energy market and potentially wider economic systems (and secondly – though in this order – to people’s lives).
<b>Markets</b>	DRE accesses and creates new markets for energy, products and labour.
<b>Scale</b>	All audiences were fixated on scale. Narratives, case studies, pilot projects all need to adopt the language and ambitions of large-scale.
<b>Frontier</b>	Language around frontiers and related terms – such as pioneering, championing, opening up – all worked well. The term “Frontier Energy” has far wider appeal than NGO terms such as “last mile”, especially for commercial financiers who already talk about “frontier finance” and “frontier markets.”
<b>Bottom of the pyramid</b>	This is a catchphrase for financiers, about the opportunities of generating lucrative markets by aggregating large numbers of lower income customers.
<b>Inevitable</b>	DRE should be presented as not a desirable ethical choice but the only clear (and logical) solution to a set of engineering, economic and policy challenges.
<b>Modern</b>	DRE can be seen within a wider modernisation agenda, especially for national policymakers.
<b>Rapid, Flexible</b>	The quick turnover and speed of implementation is a strong appeal.
<b>Sustainable</b>	Both in terms of environmentally sustainable and generating sustained and secure revenues.
<b>Stable, Secure, Reliable, Resilient</b>	The predictability of energy output and revenue is a major appeal for institutional investors, particularly compared with volatile international energy markets.

## Language around social and environmental benefits

Interviewees were more motivated by the language of “energy access” and its capacity to enable change as part of an opportunity narrative, than NGO language about it being a human right within a social justice narrative. For most people the economic and financial opportunities are the primary considerations. Policymakers in developing countries and MDBs are more motivated by the role of energy access in enabling other tangible benefits such as education and health. Financiers are more engaged with the role of energy access in enabling economic opportunity and market expansion.

Climate change was not widely recognised as a strong personal motivation or an ethical imperative behind DRE. Climate change is best presented as one of the many policy factors and energy changes that make DRE “inevitable” rather than a moral imperative.

## Language to avoid

Language to avoid	Alternatives
Overly negative messaging, focusing on deprivation or suffering (described as “continuous hand-wringing”)	Concentrate on opportunity and self reliance.
High moral tone that chastises business	Recognise the vital role of business in implementing DRE quickly and cheaply.
Fighting <i>against</i> (poverty, deprivation, injustice)	Fighting <i>for</i> (opportunity, economic participation).
Small-scale (and related words such as micro, mini, community-based)	Large-scale ambition, scalability.
Finance gap – unwillingness of investors	Finance is available and willing – scale and effective instruments are lacking.
Solar lamps – regarded critically by some financiers as symptomatic of worthy but small-scale thinking	Talk about more ambitious and larger scale examples of DRE and integrated electrification.
“Development projects” – a term that is thought of as small-scale and incapable of replication	Use the language of business: accelerator pilots, investment projects, schemes, emerging markets, etc.

# The audiences and their values



**Finding:** The audiences funding and implementing DRE are very diverse, with a wide range of values and motivations determined by organisational and geographical culture. There are some common values across the audiences and the potential for generic metanarratives. However the level of audience diversity requires that there will always need to be audience-specific design and testing.

**Recommendation:** Metanarratives may be effective across multiple audiences (especially international organisations) but should be tested before use. For each audience, explore their specific motivations and values, and search for audience-specific language. Pay particular attention to any language and values that define the differences between audiences, and the differences in national cultural values when speaking to national level audiences.

This research sought language for communicating the need (and opportunity) for prioritising DRE with three main audience categories:

1. Northern government development assistance agencies, Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs);
2. International financiers and investors;
3. Government and policymakers in the Global South.

Within a limited research project size it is not possible to fully reflect the full diversity of values within this range although we are confident, even with the small sample, that we have identified the most important principles for speaking with these audiences.

These audiences cover a very wide range of actors, organisational cultures and personal motivations. It was immediately apparent that there are very wide variations of definitions of what DRE is and who it should be serving based on professional mission, culture and politics.<sup>1</sup>

We also found significant differences between attitudes in the Global North (multilateral and bilateral funders and investors) and the Global South (government policymakers, funders, entrepreneurs).<sup>2</sup>

Many interviewees stressed these differences. A development bank specialist said “*most actors in this field [DRE] operate in complete silos.*” As another expert put it: “*At the end of the day, different countries of different people will have different preferences, different power structures in different governments, in different businesses, and will be able to implement different things.*”

It was strongly emphasised to us that people in all our target audiences were working to different mandates, defined by their employer and clients. As one leading financier put bluntly: “*nothing will work unless you can map it onto the mandate that they’ve got. Trying to persuade somebody whose mandate is to go for equities, that it’s all about distributed energy and energy access is just not going to work.*”



# The three core themes for all audiences

**Finding:** We invited all participants to share the aspects of their work that give them satisfaction and make them proud. The responses from all audiences focuses on three themes: generating strong financial returns, working at a large-scale and enabling energy access, which they expressed within audience-specific language. These could therefore be contained in a metanarrative that can speak across all audiences.

All audiences

**Recommendation:** Explore language that addresses these themes. For each audience, foreground the theme that speaks most strongly to that audience. We recommend further testing to identify the optimal language.

## 1. Financial returns

All audiences measured the success of DRE in financial terms; the turnover, the level of investment and especially the rapid growth of the sector. The primary motivation for commercial investors is making or selling products (whether technology or financial instruments). As one said: *“that’s how they will get paid, it’s what they’re there to do. That’s what they get excited about, it’s the fun of the job.”*

## 2. Large-scale

Working at a large-scale is a central consideration for all audiences for multiple reasons:

- The administrative overhead and transaction costs of managing smaller projects or multiple disbursements are not viable.
- The returns on larger scale are believed to be greater because of the “economies of scale.”
- Individuals in all audiences are emotionally driven by quantity: large numbers, large figures, large growth. Scale is the primary means for them to evaluate their personal achievement.

## 3. Energy access, development and social benefit

Every person interviewed talked about the importance of energy access in improving people’s lives, often in emotional intrinsic terms.

Campaigners often make the mistake of assuming that financiers are indifferent to the social benefits of DRE. This is certainly not the case. They told us: *“People do care about doing a good thing.” “Don’t underestimate the moral commitment of people in this field, they could probably make a lot more money from doing other things.” “We feel proud of bringing the energy question into the debates about human well-being and flourishing.”*

However it is important to stress that their emphasis is usually on increasing “energy access” and opportunity rather than reducing energy poverty and inequality – which they assume will follow.

In all these cases it is essential to remember that business and policy audiences are primarily concerned with the cost and scale of energy delivery.<sup>3</sup> However one defines it, DRE is therefore one option sitting in a range of potential investment opportunities including different energy sources (from fossil fuels to renewables),

and different forms of delivery (from integrated grid to independent microgrids and stand-alone systems).<sup>4</sup> Whatever their personal preferences, they explained that their sector was “agnostic” regarding the different options.

NGOs see many potential conflicts between profit, scale and social benefits. Financiers see these as mutually supporting within a single coherent worldview in which free market capitalism fuels innovation and competition

that delivers affordable benefits and local development. From this perspective capitalism is a moral mission. As one said:

*“The challenge [for NGOs] will be combining the moral mission, which is their reason for being, with the harder pragmatic and less moral, but actually on the larger scale, the far more moral principle of using capitalism to improve the world in a far more effective manner.”*

## The values and motivations of northern government development assistance agencies and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)

**Finding:** Individual staff members can be highly motivated by the social benefits of energy access and DRE. Institutionally, though, their primary motivation concerns scale.

**Recommendation:** With this audience, lead with the benefits of energy access within the context of increased market opportunity. All examples, case studies, and statistics should relate to a large-scale mentality.

Our interviews found that NGOs, Northern aid agencies and multilateral development banks shared some common ground around values, especially concerning the central importance of energy access and improving the livelihoods of the poorest groups.

Financiers were openly honest that they did not share this motivation: *“Talking about “no one left behind” is very compelling if you are the head of the World Bank or in a government aid agency. But if you’re a financier you care about finding an opportunity. It’s not up to you if it doesn’t work in a certain country.”*

However, it was also clear that this audience shares the values about capitalism and free market competition with financiers, and is especially motivated by scale. In the Multilateral Development Banks and government development agencies, the internal culture and the performance indicators used in career advancement require officers to maximise the quantity of loans. In the World Bank, officers receive an annual bonus calculated on the quantity of loans they process. All of the pressures are to overachieving within a specific portfolio. We heard *“smaller solutions that are more complex don’t allow them to push as much money out of the door as other large-scale projects do.”*

## The values and motivations of international financiers

**Finding:** Financiers are primarily motivated by financial returns which they relate directly to the developmental benefits of DRE. They are motivated by narratives that combine multiple benefits at all levels.

**Recommendation:** With financiers, combine all three themes but always lead with the financial returns and opportunities. Show how these lead directly to improving livelihoods, presented within the context of markets and expanding entrepreneurial opportunities.

When asked for their motivations and what made them proud, financiers combined all three of these themes into a single narrative. For example one African entrepreneur distilled what makes him proud as *“delivering power profitably...providing energy access for people on low income and making the products affordable and doing it at scale.”* Another said *“my priority is making a difference in people’s lives and we make money for our investors.”* Another said his main challenge was *“how you can get a fairly safe investment that also makes a difference to the state of the earth.”*

The financiers we interviewed were honestly straightforward about being motivated by their professional responsibility to do a job – which in their case, is maximising the financial returns for their institutions or clients. As one said *“I am not primarily concerned with people who are left behind. A lot of the people in this space find that really offensive – how can you leave out these children? Yes, absolutely, but it’s not my job. My job is to find the opportunity, if the opportunity is in Tanzania I’m going to go there, if it’s in pipelines I’m going to go there.”*

## The values and motivations of government and policymakers in the Global South

**Finding:** In this audience, there are wide variations in values and motivations which are affected, far more than the other audiences, by national culture. The way they approached the three main themes were often shaped by national history, personal experience and worldview. We heard that they may find DRE and the free market narrative to be threatening to their centralised control.

**Recommendation:** Although the three themes work, focus on the developmental benefits, modernisation, and scale. Stress the importance of government in creating the policy framework to enable the DRE economy. For national level work develop narratives that are specific to the country or region of focus.

Within countries it is much harder to differentiate between investors, business people, and policymakers. The vast majority of investment in the Global South is conducted by local small businesses and national level investors.<sup>5</sup> In many countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa, these investments are led by rich national elites and ruling families that also dominate in political and policy circles.

We heard that these groups are especially motivated by visible achievement on the ground. This favours narratives around the social benefits of DRE and the way that energy access transforms the social and cultural value of life in the community. We were told that investors may well be thinking: *“my mother still lives in the village, that’s the village I come from and I want to make sure my people get access.”*

However, they are also highly motivated by larger scale investments and the status and media publicity that goes with delivering large-scale visible development projects. *“Politicians like putting on their hard hat and opening big new projects. They like big things with as few connections as possible. They like dealing with the big six because there are six of them. They don’t want to deal with the 6000!”*

For higher level government officials (for example in India) there was also a concern for how they, and the country, would be perceived on the international stage.<sup>6</sup> Universal energy access is very much tied up with being a member of the international community, being seen as modern rather than backward.

There is a tension between the international audiences and the national level policymakers. One aspect is the concern that national level policymakers will support inefficient and expensive energy solutions if they believe that they are “modern” and convey status. As one financier said *“I think the real danger is that politics come in and the politician has promised that you’ll be electrified if you vote for him so ... dumps more money on the grid to connect.”*

But a deeper tension relates to the different attitudes towards the free market and centralised government power. For many financiers there is an ideological element to the DRE narrative; that decentralisation is an alternative to centralised state control of energy systems. According to this perspective the state is inefficient, corrupt and slow. The role of the state is to simply create the conditions for investment to happen, and relinquish control.

National level policymakers maintain that the role of centralised government is driving forward the modernisation agenda. Government representatives from the G77 and China at the negotiations in Addis Ababa on the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 expressed their desire to retain control over domestic financing and development agendas:

*“The issue of policy space for national governments must also be respected. Individual Member State regulations on public domestic financing must be the prerogative of national governments, in accordance with their own specific needs and objectives.”*

We heard that DRE narratives may be seen as a threat to that power and control. As one senior policy negotiator told us:

*“[DRE is] going to be challenging for some regulators, challenging to some grid operators, challenging for some national entities but it is already happening. I mean if you have an electric car, if you have a house that has a panel on the top you’re storing energy, you are participating in the energy system in a very different way already and I don’t think we quite know how that is going to unfold but you are not just a customer who pays someone or a utility in a far off place for the electricity you’re using.”*

# DRE means different things to different people



**Finding:** There are major differences in how NGOs and the business/policy communities understand DRE and how it delivers energy. Financiers see different delivery options as part of a wider energy sector and are less dogmatic about different energy sources or delivery options.

All audiences

**Recommendation:** Don't assume that there is any consistent understanding of DRE. For each audience and circumstance, explain exactly what you mean or tailor your definition to their personal interests.

In interviews most people were confident of their understanding of "DRE". Yet they displayed varied definitions of what it meant.

The first divergence is between *distributed* and *decentralised renewables*. In official reports, the standard definition of DRE is Distributed Renewable Energy. These are small scale energy systems that are independent from the grid, and not for industrial purposes. For example, this definition from REN21 Renewables 2015 Global Status Report states that:

*"Distributed renewable energy" refers to energy systems 1) that are relatively small and dispersed (such as small-scale solar PV on rooftops), rather than relatively large and centralised; and 2) for which generation and distribution occur independent from a centralised grid. DRE includes energy services for electrification, cooking, heating, and cooling that are generated and distributed independent of any centralised system, in urban and rural areas of the developing world."*<sup>7</sup>

There is some confusion around the word "distributed", especially in regards to its

relationship to the grid.<sup>8</sup> Many interviewees regarded renewables as an inherently distributed form of energy and that DRE would include a range of connections to grid, microgrid, or off-grid. One warned that communicators wishing to see specific local development need to be very precise when using the word "distributed" because *"someone might create a new fund for distributed energy and put all its money into large wind farms not the roofs of schools or community centres."*

Another financier included the grid as a form of distributed energy system and differentiated between the "transmission grid" which carries high-voltage transfers (for example between South Africa and Botswana) and the "distribution grid" that delivers power to individual users.

A different definition of DRE used by some of those interviewed (as well as Hivos, who commissioned this research) is as *decentralised* renewable energy. This usage posits DRE as a solution to the weaknesses of centralised power production in delivering energy access to remote communities—especially the "last mile" that is not reached by the grid.

A definition from Hivos is:

"Decentralised energy refers to a system where energy production occurs at or near the point of use, irrespective of size, technology or fuel used. It is distinct to large, central power stations and grid networks, distributing power across long distances. It encompasses mini-grids or micro-grids supplying electricity into a small distribution network as well as standalone systems providing mechanical, thermal or electrical power. Examples of the latter include diesel generators, solar water pumps or a solar home system. Decentralised electricity generation can be connected to a central grid, for instance a mini-grid that feeds into the grid."<sup>9</sup>

In all these cases it is essential to remember that business/policy audiences are primarily concerned with the cost and scale of energy delivery. Financiers are reluctant to invest in the "last mile" when there are better opportunities to be found elsewhere. *"In Nigeria, for example, you are either going to go into northern Nigeria where they have a huge need and instability or you are going to go into the margins of the city*

*where there's a huge need, larger market and people have more capacity to pay."*

Whatever the definition, DRE is therefore one option sitting in a range of potential investment opportunities including different energy sources (from fossil fuels to renewables), and different forms of delivery (from integrated grid to independent microgrids and stand-alone systems). Whatever their personal preferences, they explained that their sector was "agnostic" regarding the different options.

Financiers did not draw any clear dividing line between on-grid and off-grid systems within DRE. Some specialised in one or another system, but collectively they favoured parallel and complementary delivery systems and regard a most promising market for DRE being people with very weak and intermittent energy supply through the grid. *"Most schemes that are being invested in are connected to the grid. In most countries, for example, in India, Africa, there is a massive amount of load shedding. They are cutting off chunks of the city because they cannot provide enough power."*

## A balanced narrative - "both and" not "either or"

**Finding:** All audiences stressed that they were seeking the energy solutions that best served financial or developmental needs. All audiences said they were therefore agnostic about the best energy systems. They were wary of narrow definitions of DRE which they regarded as dogmatic and ideological driven. Commercial finance strongly favours existing markets and supplementing inadequate grid connections. They welcome additional funding and support from development agencies and MDBs for the "last mile".

**Recommendation:** Do not draw a strong dogmatic or ideological line between different forms of renewable energy. Speak instead of a mosaic or spectrum of interrelated energy options requiring similar services and products. Recognise that there will never be "one size fits all" - the primary need is to create efficient markets that can deliver a wide range of different solutions modelled on different circumstances. If focusing on the "last mile" and off-grid systems, place these within this wider spectrum, recognising that they may require additional funding support, or appeal to different kinds of investors.

All audiences

Policymakers and financiers stress the need for competitive markets to function effectively. As a result, they say, DRE may be most viable in areas that are already supplied by the grid but face constant power shortages. They argue that this will lead to efficiency, skills and economies of scale that will greatly increase the viability of reaching the last mile. They recognise that the last mile may still require subsidies or grants, but that it is best served as a top up on a strong and competitive internal market rather than as stand alone projects.

Financiers see the primary mainstream investment opportunity lying with larger scale renewable projects in existing markets with grid connections. They see growing opportunities for frontier investors financing smaller scale renewables in areas with poor grid connections.

Financiers strongly favour mixed solutions in all regards: energy systems and financial instruments. They were critical of dogmatic single options – whether DRE or grid. They criticised some NGO arguments for being “too black and white” and too “pure”.

*“At conferences, grid people get all upset because people are talking about off-grid but it’s like, can you not compute that it’s both? All the evidence is in developed economies that have the grid, the off-grid continues to operate, the decentralised pieces operate alongside the grid.”*

Financiers were inclined to see the “last mile” as part of the spectrum of inter-related products and services. They argued that all investment in renewables, including large-scale or on-grid projects, builds a competitive market in energy products and services and creates the new financial mechanisms required for DRE.

Financiers felt that microgrids and the “last mile” were still marginal for most commercial investors and said that this was *“the territory for impact investors who want to do some social good, or international development agencies such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID). That will change and this will normalise, possibly quite quickly, and within 10 years we will start to see that this is quite a standard business model.”*

The overall conclusion was that narratives should present DRE as a component within a rapidly evolving energy mix. The most viable investment will be alongside grid connections but this can generate the functioning finance models and economies of scale for “last mile” projects. Development agencies, MDBs and impact investors can then build on this infrastructure and skills base to provide additional funding for these more marginal projects to operate at scale.

## Communications terms and definitions used in this report

### Narrative and Metanarrative

A narrative is a simple story with recognisable actors that identify a problem, lay out its consequences and suggest solutions to achieve a desired resolution. Narratives are the means by which people make sense of the world, learn values, form beliefs, and give shape to their lives (Herman, D. 2013)<sup>10</sup>.

A metanarrative is an overarching narrative, built around a core concept, frame or shared value, which can generate individual narratives for specific audiences.

### Frame

A frame is a word (occasionally a short phrase) that embodies wider associations and serves as a guide to interpreting the meaning of the context within which it is used. Frame words are used by people to embody their values and worldview and signal their identity, especially to people of their own social group.

# Metanarrative 1: Opportunity frames



**Finding:** All audiences are motivated by positive language around opportunity rather than negative language around disadvantage and energy poverty. Each audience constructs distinct narratives from different configurations of four definitions of opportunity:

- Opportunities for profits and growth within the DRE sector.
- Personal and institutional investment opportunities.
- The transformative role of DRE within the wider economy.
- Social opportunity and the development opportunities from energy access.

All audiences

When invited to describe the reasons for investing in DRE, interviewees typically listed variations on the same string of keywords, as in this interview:

*“Decentralised energy is more **stable**, more **resilient**, and it’s **more flexible**, and it is **quicker and easier to deploy**. It’s more **granular** than in the big utilities, who can only buy a big portfolio of an existing asset. Rather than meeting any single need, they see it as fulfilling a cluster of qualities required in a good investment.”*

Keywords, sometimes called frames, are an essential part of effective communications. They embody a wider range of meaning and associations and signal to the audience that the message is designed to speak to their values and identity. Using the right keywords opens up ears and hearts. However using the wrong keywords will lead to disregard or even disdain.

For each of these definitions below we draw out keywords and identify the audiences with which they work.

## 1: Opportunities for profits and growth within the DRE sector

All audiences - especially private finance

Recommended keywords: Frontier

In our research, the term “frontier energy” emerged regularly in interviews including one with the executive director of a company called Frontier Energy. For financiers the word frontier has a specific meaning relating to

markets which are developing rapidly but are not yet large enough to be defined as emerging markets.<sup>11</sup> The Wall Street Journal described frontier markets as “next year’s darlings in emerging-market investing.” The word frontier is also a communications frame based around new opportunity, territory, and markets



that appeals strongly to financiers. It can be used in combination with related language of expansion: “opening up” “pioneering” and “championing.”

### Recommended keyword: Inevitable

Financiers argue that the shift to renewables in general, and DRE in particular, is the most profitable option in a shifting energy market. It is a flexible, profitable way to rapidly access new and emerging energy markets. DRE is therefore the ‘inevitable’ solution for business challenges. As one investor said: *“it doesn’t have to be solar but that just happens to be the best way.”*

## 2: Personal and institutional investment opportunities

### Recommended keywords: Stable, Secure, Reliable

All large institutional investors, such as pension funds, have a mixed portfolio of investments across the energy sector. Although DRE has risks, DRE should be compared with other forms of energy investment. Oil and gas in particular is very risky. *“You can drop a huge amount on exploration, you may or may not find gas, you may not get a reasonable rate of return from the government.”*

The feeling in the investment world is very positive towards renewables as a whole believing that they *“offer reliable long-term returns.”* For pension fund investors, renewables offer a *“stable rate of return and predictability- we can predict fairly accurately what we can produce in terms of energy and money every year. It is not exciting, it is not Google, but it offers a stable return on investment.”*

However, we were warned, this applies primarily to large-scale renewable projects in countries with stable governments and guaranteed energy prices.



What is more, looking forward they see this as the only solution to the competing pressures of economic growth and climate change.

A policymaker told us: *“the transition to these sorts of technologies is absolutely inevitable because they are a better solution not just for climate, they’re quicker to deploy, they’re more elegant solutions.”* An MDB expert said: *“plans used to have a very substantial grid component. Every year that passes, the grid component goes down and the off-grid component goes up. Increasingly off-grid is the go-to option for energy access in Africa.”*

Audiences: primarily commercial finance; some large MDBs

Communications must be balanced and realistic about the risks and not pretend that DRE is risk-free *“like a government bond”* or *“people will get very annoyed and will use the term being burnt, as though it’s not just run-of-the-mill risk.”*

### Recommended keywords: Rapid, Flexible, Resilient

A primary appeal of DRE for financiers is that it can be rolled out much faster than centralised power production, providing faster returns. *“It’s a lot quicker to sell a few solar modules than it is to set up a centralised coal plant, even from an approvals point of view-you get approval to put it on your house against you getting 1000 stakeholders and a bunch of NGOs and the national government-that’s a much more challenging proposition.”*

‘Flexibility’ has an ideological appeal for many investors. DRE spurs creative flexibility at all levels: in energy production, installation, promotion. Yet it also requires flexibility- in

particular, creating new flexible financial instruments to support investment: *“We are lacking the flexibility of a combination of grants*

and local currency loans to extend to areas with less access/market maturity. The big question is how to support this type of flexible funding." In both regards flexible is a key word.

Financiers often used the word 'resilient' for DRE, meaning that it was resistant to energy price fluctuations, and had a flexibility that could respond to market shifts. In a wider policy sense, DRE provides greater resilience for an entire energy system, especially when following the language, recommended above, of a mosaic of integrated parallel off-grid and grid systems.

### 3: The transformative role of DRE within the wider economy

All audiences - although with different nuances

**Finding:** Interviewees become most excited by DRE when they see in it a reflection of their wider ideological interests, especially a commitment to competitive open markets as a primary means of delivering economic growth.

**Recommendation:** Study and understand the economic and political argument behind free markets. Reflect those ideas, and the language behind them, in communication with financiers. Adopt narratives reflecting transformative change, challenging vested interests, developing new competitive models, and extending competitive markets.

Financiers, policymakers and NGOs alike are drawn to DRE because they see it having much wider economic, political, and ideological implications. Effective communications must recognise this and present DRE in a form that speaks to the specific values of each audience.

NGOs interpret DRE within the values of social justice, and income distribution. They focus on its capacity to deliver energy to the most marginal groups that might otherwise be left behind- and with that the opportunity for many other forms of locally controlled development.

Policymakers and development agencies and MDBs see DRE as a means to generate economic growth and expand participation in the economy.

### Recommended keywords: Sustainable

Sustainable has a double meaning. On the one hand, for NGOs and governments and intergovernmental funders it refers to ecological impact. For commercial financiers, "sustainable" refers to generating reliable long-term returns. The two can be put together: as an advisor to major pension funds told us: *"these are long-term funds so long term can only be guaranteed if there is sustainability."*

Financiers (both commercial and MDBs) share some of these progressive values but are more motivated by a narrative in which DRE is a means to break open centralised and inefficient economies, and generate new forms of entrepreneurialism. Financiers hold a compelling narrative of struggle between the entrenched vested interests of politicians and centralised power production against the free market and its inexorable logic. One put it this way: *"The risk to DRE investment is political; politicians offering/promising subsidised grid access to win votes/favours. At the root, the DRE debate is about the liberalisation of power generation and supply which, if correctly priced and supported, could make market penetration by the grid more difficult to achieve."*

In our interviews they expressed these values in the following forms. We recommend the application of these specific terms:

### Transformation (disruption)

For many financiers (but not for politicians or government level policymakers) DRE is a means to challenge the centralisation of power, vested interests and government control of the energy industry. One expert described DRE as a “disruptive technology” that shakes up established and calcified ways to working. *“There’s an amazing disruption of the utility and energy market in general going on at the moment.”* Another laid out his vision for DRE in these words:

*“The positive vision of people generating and supplying to the grid and through this process **liberating** themselves from the stranglehold of **corrupt politicians**, patriarchal hegemony, poor health, unreliable power supply, torpor and **uncompetitive and unresponsive utilities**. Ultimately a model of Western liberal democracy powered by clean energy.”*

### Property Rights

Enshrining the importance of property rights. DRE enables a major democratisation of property rights over a previously centralised

energy model, breaking down monopolies and sharing ownership. One financier described conventional power generation as “a communist model.”

### Entrepreneurship

DRE is the epitome (or even poster child) of the free market, working with the most flexible of technologies and financial instruments, sold through small entrepreneurs identifying market niches.

### Commoditisation

*Commoditisation* is an important frame for people who advocate for free markets. It is the process by which products become standardised and indistinguishable so that competition is done in a free market purely on the basis of price. DRE is highly commoditised.

### Expanding markets

DRE and the expansion of energy access is only the first step. Once you have created a customer base through energy delivery you can introduce additional products. Azure Power in India have a concept of a stepladder where customers start with light bulbs but can then move on to televisions and refrigerators- all provided by the company.

## 4: Social opportunity and the development opportunities from energy access

All audiences - although with different nuances

All audiences are motivated by the opportunity to improve people’s lives and enable them to achieve their potential. All audiences favoured positive language about opportunity rather than negative language about deprivation or energy poverty (a term that was not used in a single interview). Our interviews closely echoed the wider findings of the four country Narratives Project which tested development narratives and recommended that development organisations present aspirational achievement (“standing on your own two feet”) not victims (see Narrative Project text box below).

Each audience expressed and visualised that opportunity in different forms. Development agencies and MDBs express an interest in direct social benefits that are often close to those of development NGOs. Financiers are motivated by a larger narrative of extending economic opportunity and enabling new forms of entrepreneurialism. For them, DRE is a means to increase energy access, not decrease “energy-poverty” (this NGO phrase was not heard once in the interviews).

## The Narrative Project

The Narrative Project, led by 12 major NGO partners (including Oxfam and CARE), critically analysed and tested the narratives used by development organisations. With a large grant it was able to conduct high quality research across four countries (UK, US, France and Germany) including focus groups and surveys. Its objective was to find language that could be more effective in engaging people in the wider public without losing the support within the existing NGO supporter base.

Its findings are directly relevant to this project. Many of its criticisms of existing language and recommendations for improved language were echoed in our interviews.

It strongly recommended that NGOs should adopt a change in tone. It challenged the primary focus of NGOs on the problem (poverty, suffering), the lack of progress and moralistic arguments for increasing intervention. It found that the most effective communications presented development programmes as a means for people in the world's poorest places to become independent or self-sufficient so they could "stand on their own two feet" and "achieve their full potential". It stressed the need for positive language about achievements, results and progress (how much has been achieved) and a way of working based on partnership to share knowledge and responsibility.

The table of "don'ts" included:

- Don't expect facts and figures about progress alone to convince people to support development.
- Don't invoke pity or characterise people in developing countries as helpless victims or assert that people have an obligation to support development.
- Don't lead with "the problems" – focus on "why" a person should support development (for example: independence, shared values, the value of human life).
- Don't use long-term timeframes to communicate a goal or vision.
- Don't use the term "foreign aid". Many people associate the term with short-term crisis, and others associate it with money that is wasted.
- Don't try to downplay the problem of corruption or minimise the scale of it. Instead, talk about it as an 'injustice' against both donors and participants.

<https://www.bond.org.uk/resources/narrative-project-user-guide>

All audiences were motivated by narratives around energy access, business and entrepreneurialism at three levels.

### Economic activity

Energy access enables all other forms of economic activity. As one businessman put it: *"There is an amazingly exciting story to be told about micro-business around energy and water. If you can create an energy business in a community, it becomes like a generator, not just of energy but of money and that can be very transformative."*

### Skills & Enterprise

The installation and maintenance of DRE creates new skills and enterprises. *"Once you know how to establish and run a business they have a skill that is very applicable to anything else that they need."*

### Participation

Energy access enables participation in the wider economy: *"It doesn't matter where you are in the food chain, you can participate in a way that you have never been able to before."*

# Metanarrative 2: Scale



**Finding:** Across all audiences the principle concern about DRE, mentioned in every interview, is the lack of scale. Planning and business models require large-scale operation, and individuals in these fields are personally motivated by scale and dismissive of small-scale projects.

All audiences

**Recommendation:** Avoid using language that emphasises small-scale limitations. Talk up ambitions for expansion and the potential for rapid growth. In case studies and demonstration sites, focus on large-scale projects (even if these are less “pure” examples of grid-connected DRE). In statistics, emphasise ambition and potential growth. In particular, point out the potential risks of ignoring small-scale opportunities (see text box below).

The different ways that NGOs and people in business and finance talk about scale appears to be central to the failure of the two groups to communicate. NGOs are concerned with delivery benefits and very invested in the specific outcomes.

Ideologically they have always been drawn to the principle of “appropriate” technology and small scale community-based development. Business/finance are more concerned with the big picture and largely motivated by achieving a large-scale.

In our interviews people repeatedly spoke of their excitement over scale, the need to “scale up” and their disinterest in small size developments- which, tellingly, they stigmatised as “development projects”.

Advocates in the financial community regard the small scale of DRE to be their biggest challenge.

*“I talk to investors about that market and they say that’s okay, that’s fine, but I’m not interested in 3 million. This is not worth my effort. Come to me when you’ve got 20,000 of those systems lumped together, and I can put*

*a hundred million into it. So, the challenge to those markets is scale and after that its finding the capital.”*



*“If you spend your time investing in small things that don’t give you the big return then you will be out of business pretty quick. So from a business point of view you are*

*always looking for scale. Unless you’re looking to produce thousands of small things, in which case you are still looking for scale.”*

As noted above, scale is also a primary motivation for the staff of MDBs and development agencies whose career rewards are based around the quantity of funding they release. It is also a major concern for politicians and their policy advisors who are seeking

the best visible proof that they are bringing modernisation and development.

They will tolerate a smaller pilot project but only if they believe it has large-scale application. As

one government development officer said: *“I look at a market transformation and how to scale up solutions that have been piloted... How can you really accelerate a bit more to take these markets and solutions to the next level?”*

## The risks of ignoring emerging opportunities

There are wider arguments as to why investors should not reject opportunities just because they involve large numbers of people paying smaller amounts. This is referred to by financiers as “the bottom of the pyramid”, following a highly influential book by business academic C. K. Prahalad: “The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty through Profits”.

As one financier pointed out, American telecoms companies ignored the Mexican market in the 1980s and 1990s because the people were poor, but ignored the size of the population. The man who moved into that market, Carlos Slim is now the world’s richest man and provides a potent warning against missing opportunities. Many financiers anticipate fortunes could be made in DRE once one finds the right opportunity, and the right expansion model.

# Metanarrative 3: Climate change

**Finding:** Climate change was mentioned very little in interviews. Policy officers and MDB staff mentioned it within a package (or a checklist) of social and environmental benefits, but not in isolation. Financiers hardly mentioned it at all as a motivation for DRE.

All audiences - especially policymakers and MDBs

**Recommendation:** Do not ignore climate change - it is a central part of NGO agendas and will be of growing relevance for all audiences. Rather, include it within the general benefits of DRE and mobilise the growing constraints on carbon fuels as clear evidence that the transition into renewables is now inevitable. Possibly (with caution) try the financial narrative that DRE is a way for people to achieve energy access without being held back by climate change regulation.

In our research only Northern development professionals combined concern about the issues of climate change and energy supply: *“there is an urgent need for energy access and a huge climate change challenge to come together.”* It is not a major stand alone issue for policymakers in developing countries: *“on the ground they don’t care about climate change. They want to get power to their people, and the health benefits that come with this.”*

Financiers, even those with strong environmental principles, do not think climate change needs to

be a major part of their narrative: *“I don’t think we need to talk about climate change with this stuff. I think we need to talk about opportunity and hope.”*

Some financiers are more inclined to see climate change regulation as a potential

threat to energy access: *“Poor people can’t have electricity because the emissions will bust our climate targets.”* They argue that DRE allows people to have access to energy without their development being *“sacrificed on the altar of emissions reductions.”*



# Metanarrative 4: New stories and new communicators



**Finding:** All audiences are motivated by inspiring stories told by authentic communicators they can trust, speaking from their own experience. All audiences respond best to experiencing DRE projects on the ground or, failing that, in engaging materials and case studies. They have limited trust for NGOs but are inspired by communicators who embody entrepreneurialism and opportunity.

All audiences

**Recommendation:** Promote DRE through stories and case studies, visual images and videos that enable people to experience the physicality of the project. Emphasise projects that are working at scale, delivering strong returns and profits. Where possible organise site visits and personal interactions. Seek effective communicators who can talk with enthusiasm about success, growth, and opportunity.

All humans are motivated by stories, even – maybe especially – those who appear to be most motivated by facts and figures.

We asked everyone we interviewed what excited them and who they trusted to tell them about the opportunities of DRE. The findings were remarkably consistent – seeing things with their own eyes, and hearing the stories of the entrepreneurs:

*“What really excites me is when I visit the project – especially one of these decentralised projects where you actually meet the entrepreneurs who have taken up this work. Then you don’t look to it as a project anymore.”*

In some cases, seeing DRE in place can almost be a personal epiphany. One story about an MDB official made this clear. Not surprisingly it contained the critical element of being on a large-scale:

*“I was speaking to a very senior official in the World Bank who had just come from West Africa and seen a very large decentralised mini-grid operating. She had never seen one before and was extremely enthusiastic and will become a very effective advocate. Until that point she had thought it was just a lot of hype until she had been on the ground and seen how effective it could be.”*

The establishment of effective models, especially those with innovative financing, is critically important for generating further investor interest: *“What’s driving the transition are the growing numbers of examples of this approach working.” “It’s very much this demonstration effect – this company has been around and delivered successfully.”*

Case studies were also critical for mobilising investment because, as we heard again and again, the greatest obstacle to growth is the



attitude of “wait and see.” Investors need to know that a given approach is viable.

Aid agencies and MDBs have a lead role in showing that renewables are viable at scale. The vital (and often missing) component is ensuring that individual projects inspire further activity. *“Everyone thought wind farms in Mexico were too risky until the Inter-American Development Bank started building a wind farm and after that the private sector without any support from government or social venture for finance built number two and number three. As soon as you are able to demonstrate that it can be done then it becomes a standard solution which you can invest in with lower risks.”*

Finally, all projects create the basis for further expansion, providing a foundation of skills and experience in the country, cash flows for further investment, a supply chain of equipment and technology, and economies of scale.



We asked all interviewees who they felt would be trusted voices for their audience. It is clear that there is no simple answer – financiers are highly competitive and many people only trust their own judgement. As one financier said: *“No one will be trusted. No one is stupid enough to trust anyone that much.”*

However, it was soon clear that people were strongly engaged by the success stories of individual entrepreneurs: *“If people could see themselves in the story then they are likely to get*

*involved.”* Across the interviews a narrative of the pioneering individualist(s) emerged:

*“The entrepreneur who has been down in Africa doing his thing... who doesn't depend on anybody else and also not on government policy and development... Local business people who understand local needs, who believe in it, who understand what is good about it, the benefits it can bring, and know what they are doing on the ground.”*

# Metanarrative 5: Addressing the major challenges facing investors



**Finding:** NGO narratives rarely address the complex set of risks and obstacles facing investors in DRE. It is not sufficient to simply ask for more investment – expansion requires that these obstacles must be recognised and overcome.

All audiences

**Recommendation:** In communications, recognise the importance of these obstacles – especially those that are perceived by investors as risks. Address them in detail. In campaigning and lobbying include market and policy reforms that will enable and support inward investment into DRE.

The primary obstacles and risks, mentioned repeatedly across the interviews, were:

1. Uncertainty of the policy environment, especially with unstable governments.
2. The financial instability and low ability of communities to pay.
3. The arrival of grid connections before a mini grid has paid back its investment.

There were mixed views about the arrival of the grid. Some regarded this as a major threat and built their business model on avoiding it: *“We only go to places where, for the next 10 years, the grid will not arrive, by which time we will have paid for our investment.”* Others believed that an off-grid system could still compete well with a grid that provides inadequate or irregular energy supply.

4. Fiscal policy, for example import duties on panels.
5. Exchange rates. *“In Nigeria one of the greatest challenges you have is the exchange rate fluctuation.”*

6. Costs. The costs of the technology, the cost of moving them between countries (exchange rates and trade barriers).
7. “Security of assets.” Potential damage to generating capital and the need for protection or insurance.
8. Maintenance costs that need to be fully absorbed within the model. Maintenance must be a central part of the business plan. Financiers pointed out that NGOs’ “project mentality” often neglects the importance of maintenance: *“It’s no good installing it and then leaving it because it needs to be maintained. That’s what utilities do, not charities. Every time a charity has gone and said here are a million lights, a few years later there is 20,000 of them in use and the rest of them are in a local river!”*
9. Lack of accurate data about performance or returns. Several times financiers expressed concern that in the absence of accurate data it was hard to make secure financial decisions.

# Non-Governmental Organisations - dos and don'ts

There are deep and profound differences in values between Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs – sometimes also called Civil Society Organisations or Non-Profit Organisations) and other stakeholders, especially financiers. An NGO campaigner explained: *“they think as bankers and we think as activists and we don't really meet eye-to-eye on the things we do. The critical question is how do we make them see what we see from a banker perspective, that is understandable to them and makes sense. We have not been able to do that so far with the work that we do.”*



NGOs argue for DRE from the perspective of their own values. A simple example can be found in this quote from a leading NGO:

*“DRE brings social and economic development that is a cheaper and quicker way to fight energy poverty as opposed to large-scale, centralised energy projects.”*

A financier is very likely to share NGO concerns over poverty, however this formulation does

not speak in any way to his or her primary motivations. Financiers do not ‘fight’ poverty. They have no operating concept of “energy poverty” and never use this phrase. They are not concerned with delivering “cheap” energy (which to their mind suggests low profits or subsidies). They are not fundamentally opposed to centralised energy projects and are certainly not opposed to “large-scale” projects – in fact they actively seek them out.

A similar quote for a financial audience might contain common components with the one above, but would use entirely different language, for example:

*“DRE is a rapidly growing market that is already bringing strong and sustained returns, offering multiple opportunities for new entrants. DRE is transforming the delivery of energy from centrally controlled power systems to a far more flexible and competitive model that will greatly expand access to energy and wider markets, enable entrepreneurialism at all levels and bring with it economic and social development.”*

## External criticisms of some NGO communications

Generally the interviewees recognised the importance and relevance of NGOs. They stressed that their criticisms only applied to some NGOs output.

### High moral tone and judgmentalism

People dislike a judgmental tone of “do-gooding” and “hand wringing”. They argue that such language may be condescending: *“it is often the wrong way round – about what is going to help these poor starving black people who can’t work it out for themselves.”*

### Overly purist

Some NGOs are criticised for not being prepared to compromise or accept that change may not *“tick every one of their boxes”*. One business person complained, *“I have sat through mindless discussions about whether*

*mini grids have to be green or not – they might be 95% green and have 5% diesel in them. Some NGOs want to go to purity too early and the focus on the ‘perfect’ risks driving out the ‘good’..”*

### Lack of understanding of business

There was a general complaint about NGO communications that don’t understand the detail of business or investment: *“they don’t reflect the whole picture of the way that good investments happen... There is very often a ‘dust storm’ that this is a good thing and we ought to be doing it.”*

## Specific advice

### Don’t use small-scale language

As noted above, all the audiences are concerned – even fixated – with scale. Even when operating a relatively small project, they will describe it as a pilot or phase one for a much more ambitious large-scale version. Yet NGOs are very attached to small-scale models and small-scale language.

NGOs need to scrutinise their language from this perspective. For example they might seek new language for micro-finance (a term described by one financier as *“a turnoff because it’s patronising”*), microgeneration and even micro-grids. Other ‘downbeat’ terminology includes low impact, low emissions, low carbon and of course, small-scale.

### Be careful when talking about “development projects” and solar lamps

Financiers disliked the language of “development projects” which, for them, is a shorthand for small-scale and un-economic activities. *“NGOs tend to ‘development project’ size things”* said one, but *“you will never*

*get to scale with a development project.”* They explicitly said this was the opposite of what they seek to achieve. *“This is not about development projects, this is about building a market for energy systems and services.”*

Although no one would doubt that solar lamps bring benefits, they epitomise for financiers the weaknesses of these small-scale “development projects”. One observer commented: *“It is still considered boutique. Many planners and engineers haven’t done themselves any favours by portraying DRE as lighting lamps.”* Another said: *“at the end of the day you are not going to do big business if you’re selling a few solar lanterns – if you’re selling millions maybe, but not a few.”*

### Reconsider focus or language around “greatest need” and the “last mile”

There is criticism of NGOs’ insistence on owning the last mile. In the view of business and policy people, *“the dynamism of last mile connections belongs to local enterprises, small businesses and entrepreneurs”* and this is who they wish to hear from.

From a business point of view, the last mile and those in greatest need may not be the right place to invest your time and effort anyway because those in greatest need may not be those with the greatest ability to pay for it. There's more likelihood in creating a business on the margins of a city than in rural Nigeria. Their argument is that business can provide more benefit overall by operating at a larger scale to develop the more economically viable markets, and then apply these models with their economies of scale to the more marginal markets. As one financier said: *"NGOs exist because they are helping the needy. They should not stop trying to do that, they should probably just think about the most effective way of helping the most people, rather than the most in need."*

There may be value for NGOs in presenting commitment to the last mile as complementary to the larger business model – for example by seeking additional funding to enable companies to roll out tried and tested models to less profitable markets.

### Don't talk about the "finance gap"

A common phrase used by NGOs is that "everyone understands the need but there is a lack of finance". For financiers this is entirely wrong. As they say: *"there isn't an absence of money – the solutions are simply not yet economic at the scale that you want them to be."* This sidesteps the issue as a gap in the economic framework. The talk about a lack of finance is almost a signal to business that *"it is not economic and you should not bother with it for five years."*

## Three suggestions for improving the relationship with finance and policy makers

1. NGOs have a reputation for integrity and are respected for their commitment to social benefits. NGOs should recognise this and continue to speak clearly and critically about social needs. However NGOs should explore, with the target audiences, the parameters beyond which they are no longer a trusted voice. Beyond this boundary they should recruit new and more trusted communicators from within their target audiences.
2. Seeking ways that they can present their social mission as fitting alongside or within larger scale business models. This might include strategic partnerships with business and entrepreneurs.
3. Enabling a flow of innovative ideas between the civil society and business sectors, seeking to learn from each other. This might begin with roundtables and fora within which to share ideas (rather than lobby or campaign). It might then move towards mutually advantageous partnerships and joint representations to funders or policymakers.

# Methodology

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There were three major sources of research: semi-structured interviews, an analysis of existing communication materials, and a rapid review of published peer-reviewed research papers. These were supplemented with additional material from other related interviews and previous Climate Outreach research into DRE.

## Interviews

Interviews were held with ten prominent experts from the target audiences. Their details are given in the introduction. The interviews followed a fixed schedule of questions common to all interviewees. The semi-structured approach allowed for unanticipated avenues of questioning to be explored, and the flexibility to truncate or extend the interviews according to circumstances.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The transcripts were coded in a process called 'open coding' where the text is broken down into component parts and reconstructed according to themes emerging from the analysis, rather than any predetermined theory. The authors worked separately on this stage of the analysis and then merged the separate results through an iterative process.

## Analysis of public facing communications

Reports from the following institutions (identified by the client as 'target audiences') were analysed. Their websites were searched using a combination of the same terms as were used for the academic review. Technically this would be considered to be "grey literature".

- World Bank
- African Development Bank
- Inter-American Development Bank
- New Deal on Energy for Africa
- Green Climate Fund
- International Energy Association
- Southern African Development Community
- Ecowas Centre for Renewable Energy

## Review of academic literature

Time constraints meant this was a rapid - as opposed to systematic and exhaustive - review of the literature. The search was focused on three journals: *Energy Policy*, *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, and *Energy Research and Social Science*. Various combinations of 'Decentralised Renewable Energy', 'off-grid', 'energy access' and 'narratives' were used. Where the title and abstract indicated a strong relationship to the themes of this review, the paper was read and relevant sections analysed. There was very little research on DRE *narratives* found in this search. The search was limited to papers from the last 10 years.

## Additional sources

In addition to the formal interviews (listed in the Introduction), Climate Outreach also analysed transcriptions from five additional interviews with leading officers in MDBs and development banks. These were confidential and the individuals cannot be named.

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11. See for example "Frontier Markets: To boldly go where few investors have gone before!", Doughroller website, March 22 2012, [www.doughroller.net/investing/frontier-markets-to-boldly-go-where-few-investors-have-gone-before/](http://www.doughroller.net/investing/frontier-markets-to-boldly-go-where-few-investors-have-gone-before/)