

# Draft Speech on Renewable Energy

Climate Change is the single biggest issue facing humanity today. It is a challenge that demands collective action if it is to be overcome, not just between countries, but between communities and individuals too. Moving away from our dependence on fossil fuels in favour of cleaner alternatives is essential if we are to make the planet inhabitable for future generations. However, the transition to renewable energy has often been hindered when the public has lacked either the money, or the physical capacity to produce it themselves. Furthermore, green projects have often generated considerable local opposition when they do not have the consent of the local community, as has been seen in the case of wind turbines in particular.

At the same time, the energy market is failing to function in the interest of consumers in many member states. Provision has become dominated by a few large firms, whilst the public are reluctant to shop around for better deals, resulting in a market where fair competition is increasingly lacking. The need for an energy supply that is both clean and affordable to ordinary citizens is of vital importance if society is to tackle both the climate crisis and cost of living issues in a sustainable way.

The co-operative sector can offer a powerful tool in helping to achieve these goals, through the establishment of Renewable Energy Co-operatives, or 'REScoops'. These are collectively owned initiatives aimed at promoting clean power, whether through its development, sale, or other related services. This approach gives communities the chance to share in the immense economic benefits presented by the transition away from fossil fuels. This is an opportunity that is currently unavailable to many individuals, either because they don't have the money, or because their properties lack the physical capacity to generate clean energy, for example if they have a roof that is not suitable for solar panels.

By coming together into a co-operative, citizens can overcome these barriers by investing in renewable energy installations at an affordable price. Members are given the opportunity to democratically control their own energy supply. They are consulted when setting prices, giving them access to electricity at a fair rate. They can also decide how to spend profits, which can take the form of a dividend distributed to members, lower prices, or investment in other green projects within the local area. In all these cases, the returns from energy production stay within their local economy. This in turn fosters greater social acceptance for these projects within the community.

Renewable Energy Co-operatives have seen a large growth in recent years. Take-up has been particularly strong in countries like Germany, where small scale enterprises account for a significant proportion of the country's over 900 grid operators. However, in recent years, Germany's network of renewable energy co-operatives has come under increasing threat from the European Union, who for years have been pushing for change that would reduce the number of companies that control the energy grid. As a result, many smaller firms have found themselves having to relinquish their ownership.

Action should be taken to address this and a number of other issues that face REScoops. National governments should support citizen ownership and participation in the field of clean energy, for example by setting planning expectations and production targets for renewables, and specifically community power. In addition, co-operatives should not be subject to competitive bidding processes for state support, and instead should be eligible for feed in tariffs. Finally, governments at all levels should provide support for feasibility studies into community power projects. Taking these steps will ensure the continued growth of a strong network of renewable energy co-operatives, which can play a major role in the transition to a greener economy, as well as offering an affordable, community driven alternative to consumers.

## Questions

- How can more people be encouraged to participate in renewable energy co-operatives?
- What can progressives do to promote renewable energy co-operatives outside of state policy?

