Understanding social ownership in context

Towards a just transition in South Africa

The concept of social ownership has re-emerged in recent years in South Africa, mostly as part of the discourse on the just transition. It's become part of the mainstream narrative and its definition has been loosely defined to apply to various types of ownership. In this article, KATRINA LEHMANN-GRUBE, JULIA TAYLOR and KHWEZI MABASA redefine the concept to fit the historical and political economy context.

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Abstract

The concept of social ownership has re-emerged in recent years in South Africa within the context of the just transition. The term has been mainstreamed into policy discourse; however, it typically includes a wide range of ownership types, even including private ownership. This risks the dilution of its meaning. This paper aims to define and situate social ownership in its historical and political economy context, both generally, but also in South Africa.

We argue the key characteristics of social ownership include a collective ownership structure, the pursuit of public benefit, democratic control of decision-making, and an ethic of cooperation or solidarity. Therefore, worker ownership, cooperatives, and public ownership can be considered types of social ownership. Despite the renewed interest, social ownership models are not new in South Africa. There are contemporary and historic examples from which we can draw lessons and experiences.

While many of these social ownership models have successes in pursuing public good outcomes, they have also all faced challenges in achieving democratic governance, benefit-sharing, and financial sustainability.

The key indicator of a successful social ownership model is its public benefit and social return. While the resurgence of social ownership has been applied almost exclusively to the renewable energy sector, a just transition requires an economy-wide transition which addresses fundamental challenges to South African society, such as inequality, poverty and unemployment.

Introduction

The concept of social ownership has re-emerged in recent years in South Africa within the context of the just transition. Various policies and frameworks have mainstreamed the term as a means of achieving justice in the low-carbon transition. In the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP) (Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2022), social ownership is put forward as a means to address the extreme levels of wealth concentration and inequality in South Africa, through "broadening ownership of productive assets" (p. 196).

The inclusion of social ownership in plans and policies for a just transition has long been called for by civil society, particularly trade unions. In 2012, the National Union of Metal Workers in South Africa (NUMSA) put forward a 'Motivation for a Socially Owned Renewable Energy Sector' (NUMSA, 2012). Here, social ownership is interpreted as "genuine public ownership and democratic control of energy". This was written as a direct critique of the private sector's renewable energy programme announced a year earlier. In their call to action, NUMSA put forward support for renewable community energy cooperatives, democratically controlled renewable energy parastatals, and municipal-owned entities, and the use of high-potential renewable energy land under public and collective ownership, all as examples of social ownership of renewable energy.

There is a burgeoning literature examining existing and potential models for social ownership in South Africa in the context of transition but mostly restricted to the renewable energy sector (Cherry et al., 2023). Cherry et al. (2023) define social ownership as "pro-poor and pro-people programmes based on human need" (p. 9). With this, they identify numerous existing examples in the South African context. These range from community ownership as part of the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), [1]

crowdsourced private investments, Eskom mini-grid projects, cooperatives selling to the municipality through feed-in tariffs, and numerous other mini-grids facilitated by non-governmental organisations, donors, and research institutes.

A feasibility study on 'Community-Led Socially Owned Renewable Energy Development' conducted by Sustainable Energy Africa (2022) examined many of the same examples as Cherry et al. (2023) and conducted a study on energy use and access in low-income households. Many of these examples are community-led, rather than community-owned, or simply represent small-scale alternatives to electricity provided by the state, which serve a population the size of a 'community'.

In many of these reports, social ownership covers almost the full range of ownership models. For example, the JET IP lists "state ownership at different levels (for example, municipalities), employee ownership, co-operative ownership, citizen ownership of equity in private companies or vehicles, individual ownership, and collective ownership (and management)" all as examples of social ownership (Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2022, p. 196).

Cherry et al. (2023) include a similar list but exclude individual ownership. While the breadth of the term allows for the inclusion of many different alternative models being piloted in the renewable energy space, there is also a risk that its meaning is diluted, with some even including private ownership, fundamentally contradicting a common understanding of social ownership. This is representative of the broader private-sector led approach being pursued within the JET IP (Olver, 2026).

Therefore, this article aims to define and situate social ownership in its historical and political economy context, both generally, but also in South Africa. It is structured as follows: after the introduction, section 2 examines the definition and types of social ownership, section 3 explores

a brief history of social ownership, section 4 examines social ownership experiences in South Africa, and section 5 concludes.

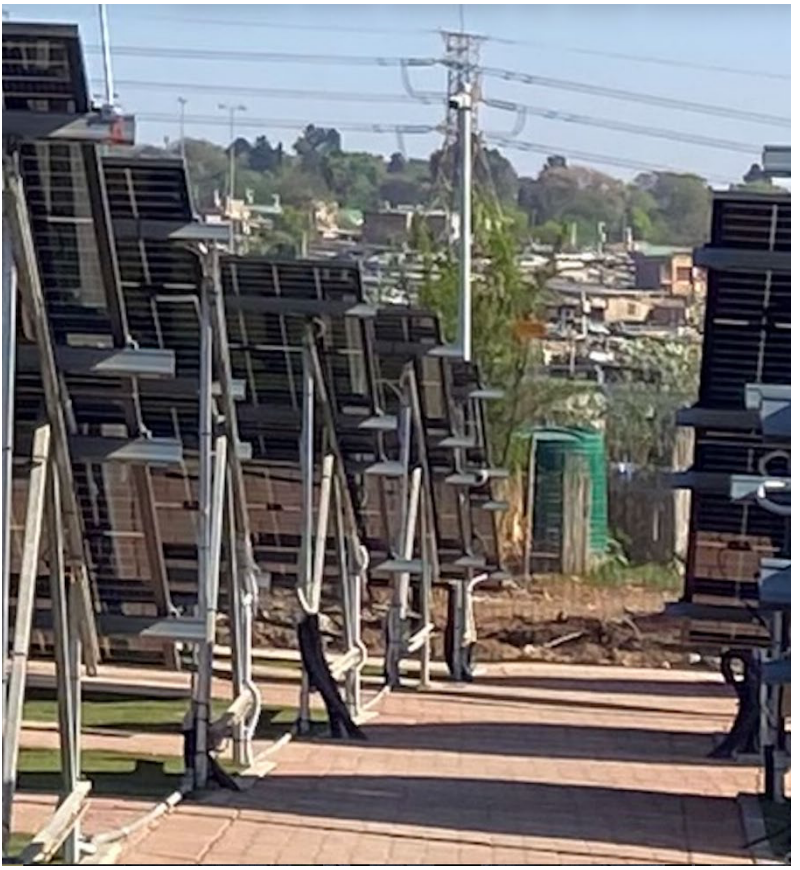
Defining social ownership

Despite its widespread use within South Africa's current context, there is relatively little academic literature on 'social ownership'. This is potentially because various terms can be used to describe a similar concept, including collective ownership, communal ownership, popular ownership, public ownership, socialism, and so on.

The common understanding of social ownership is that it represents a form of ownership which is collective (not individual) and often has a mandate for public benefit. But to understand social ownership, we must first understand ownership. Ownership has legal, philosophical, economic, political, and ethical dimensions. Traditionally, ownership is considered to be about a relationship which people have to an object. This relationship defines their rights to that object, for example, the rights to use, to make decisions over, to sell or transfer, to dispose of, to reap benefit from, and to destroy. In the South African legal system, to own something means to have the most comprehensive set of rights someone can have over an object. It includes the rights to possess, use, enjoy, exclude others, and even destroy one's property, with some limitations (Maseko, 2020).

In the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan (JET IP), social ownership is put forward as a means to address the extreme levels of wealth concentration and inequality in South Africa, through "broadening ownership of productive assets".

However, in the Marxist tradition, it is emphasised that "ownership is a relationship among people that is concealed behind people's relationships to things" (Iasin, 1985, p. 49), because it is fundamentally about the relationship between those who own and those who do not. Those who own property are able to exclude others from using or benefitting from it. This is a foundation of capitalism and of unequal concentrations of wealth.



The contrast between old and new, rich and poor, development and underdevelopment: A solar mini grid in Johannesburg adjacent to a housing settlement.
Photo: Katrina Lehmann-Grube

Ownership rights are enacted with three main criteria. First, one should have a title deed − some kind of legally recognised confirmation of ownership. Second, one should have operational control (or decision-making) over the entity. Third, one should have the right to access the profits or benefits stemming from the entity (Cocutz, 1953; Willoughby & Fignole, 2023).

A definition of *social ownership* in line with the above definition of *ownership* should therefore include: 1) The legal right to the entity must be allocated to a collective such as a group of people or a group of representatives such as the state; 2) operational control or decision-making about the entity must be made by a collective or the state; and 3) a set of rules should determine rights to access the benefits of ownership. The rules of decision-making or benefit distribution are often established through a government, board or council (Cocutz, 1953).

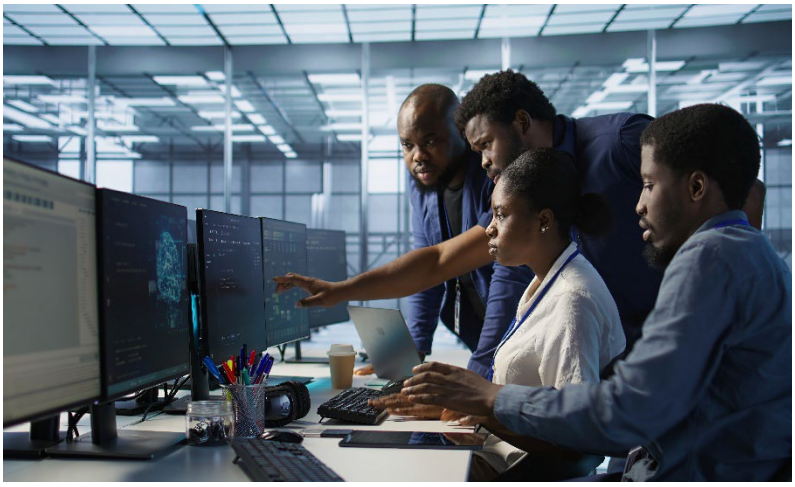
The literature on social ownership does not provide a coherent definition, but based on the definitions of ownership above, and drawing from a broader project by the authors (Lehmann-Grube et al., 2025), which includes interviews and case studies, we identify four criteria which define social ownership.

The first criterion of social ownership is collective ownership − which means that an entity is owned by a grouping of people whom it serves or that an entity is owned by a body which represents such a grouping (such as a state) (Cocutz, 1953; Willoughby & Fignole, 2023). The types of ownership which meet this criterion are cooperatives, public ownership, and municipal ownership. Collective ownership is by members who are also the recipients of the entity's services.

The second feature of social ownership is the focus on public benefit or social returns, rather than profit maximisation (Minns, 1996). These social goods can include improving access to public goods,

decreasing inequality, ameliorating ecological degradation, transforming economic structures as well as experimenting with alternative development paradigms. The types of ownership which meet this criterion include public ownership, municipal ownership, cooperatives, and not-for-profit organisations.

The centrality of democratic and participatory decision-making governance is the third feature of social ownership (Minns, 1996). Cooperatives have a clear mandate to ensure participatory decision-making, so they meet this criterion. Public and municipal ownership models should also meet this criterion, but the realities of state decision-making processes make this uncertain. This may depend on the constitution of a country and the political party in power. National government entities often lack a direct approach to participation, which can mean that elites in policy-making end up making decisions (Sebola, 2016). Local government is seen as more conducive to participatory decision-making but has also faced severe criticism in the South African context (Maphazi et al., 2013).



Social ownership meets the criteria of democratic, participatory decision-making. Photo: Shutterstock

Providing renewable energy to a rural school.
Photo: Flickr

The fourth feature of social ownership includes a commitment to solidarity and cooperation. This feature is arguably most possible in public ownership, municipal ownership, cooperatives, and not-for-profit organisations, as those who are profit-seeking are usually in competition.

Typically, worker ownership, cooperatives, and state ownership are considered the main forms of social ownership, although they may each have limitations in achieving all the mentioned criteria in practice. Public-private partnerships, an open-investment model, and a split ownership model cannot be considered social ownership based on these criteria. Non-profit organisations meet two of the four criteria: public benefit and solidarity and cooperation.

Cooperatives are arguably the clearest form of social ownership as they easily meet all four criteria. Cooperatives are a well-established type of organisation which has a set of principles which are laid out by

the International Cooperative Alliance (2017): voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community.

Public and municipal ownership meet the criteria as their main function is to provide social benefit (and not profits), they should be based on solidarity and cooperation, and they are governed by representatives of democratically elected governments. However, they have faced criticism for their ability to support democratic and participatory decision-making.

History of social ownership

Ownership over the means of production is a defining feature of different economic systems. Capitalism is defined by its labour relations, with a class that owns the means of production, and those who receive a wage for their labour. Private ownership, institutionalised with legal private property, is a defining feature of capitalism, and can be connected to the high levels of inequality across the world (Atkinson, 2018). Therefore, social ownership has always been part of socialist and communist movements as it addresses one of the core tenets of capitalism. Due to its association with socialism, the concept of social ownership was used much more historically.

Social ownership was particularly prevalent in the former Eastern Bloc. The former Yugoslavia[2] had well-developed theory and practice on social ownership. It formed the basis of their socio-economic system and defined the relations of production (Maksimović, 1983). This was based on the fundamental principle that, according to the country's 1963 constitution, the "means of production" should be a "common and inalienable foundation of associated labour" and "man's labour shall be the only basis for acquiring the products of social labour and the basis for

managing the social resources" (Maksimović, 1983, p. 157). In this case, social ownership took the form of worker councils, "in which workers fulfil directly or equally their social-, economic- and self-administering rights, and decide on issues dealing with the socio-economic situation of the organization" (Papajorgji & Alikaj, 2015, p. 47).

The function of social ownership in this system was three-fold: 1) To produce enough goods, of a high enough quality, to satisfy the material needs of society; 2) to enable every member of society to develop their capabilities; and 3) to stimulate producers to offer the largest and most rational production. Yugoslavia was very distinctive in this model, as social ownership in other parts of the former Eastern Bloc was largely in the form of centralised state-ownership and collectivisation.

The ownership of the means of production by the state, or public ownership, was not only popular in the former socialist states. Public ownership was prevalent in many other parts of the world, in the form of nationally owned enterprises which were common after the Second World War (Cumbers, 2021). While this was mostly advocated for by more left-wing parties (such as the UK's Labour Party), public ownership was also used as "an instrument for promoting social and political unification, securing national defence and related strategic considerations, in some instances for promoting economic growth" (Millward, 2011, p. 377). This can explain how public ownership was prominent even in countries without strong socialist pressures, such as the US and Japan. Public ownership saw significant declines globally during the period of neoliberalism, with the privatisation of many state-owned enterprises and the decline of the public sector (Schmitt & Obinger, 2015; Toninelli, 2000).

With the development of varieties of 'African socialisms' in the 1960s, socialist principles were merged with African economic and philosophical traditions. A key component of this was the concept of communalism, which is widely argued to be a cornerstone of many

African philosophies, in contrast to the individualism of the West (Ikuenobe, 2006).

Instead of viewing the individual and the community as separate entities, this perspective recognises that they are mutually supportive. Individuals are expected to contribute to the broader community, which in turn enhances their own well-being (Ikuenobe, 2018). Kwame Nkrumah linked communalism and socialism. He argued that "[I]n socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances … it is a form of social organisation that, guided by the principles underlying communalism, adopts procedures and measures made necessary by demographic and technological developments" (Nkrumah, 1967).

As with other varieties of socialism, ownership over the means of production remained central. For example, the Tanganyika African National Union's (TANU's)[3] Policy on Socialism and Self Reliance highlights the importance of social ownership: "The way to build and maintain socialism is to ensure that the major means of production are under the control and ownership of the Peasants and the Workers themselves through their Government and their Co-operatives" (Nyerere, 1967, p. 3).

Various forms of African socialism did not advocate solely for state ownership but also included cooperatives. The mainstream Western model of cooperatives, however, is generally traced back to the mid-19th century in England with the formation of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. This was a society formed specifically in response to the exploitative nature of work and capitalism during the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, "the cooperative model of economic organisation was seen as the only viable means to protect the collective interests of the poor and vulnerable" (Okem & Stanton, 2016, p. 17).

The Rochdale Pioneers established the Rochdale Principles, which formed the basis of the modern cooperative principles put forward by the International Cooperative Alliance (International Co-operative Alliance, 2017). These models were introduced to Africa during the colonial period and were often "treated as instruments for propagating public economic and social policy" (Develtere et al., 2008, p. 11). However, they have evolved in the post-colonial period, which has allowed for the cooperative movement to become more about the needs and desires of the members (Wanyama et al., 2009).

The history of social ownership has been shaped by macroeconomic factors. In many of the historical examples discussed, social ownership formed a fundamental part of how the state organised a country's production, resources, and labour. Today, social ownership models often occur, or are promoted, as smaller-scale supplements to more dominant private ownership. As such, state, market, and society power relations throughout history determined how social ownership models were formulated and designed (Williams, 2014).

This can be summarised under three different approaches. In the first, the state is responsible for creating a conducive regulatory environment, which allows organisations with a social mandate to operate autonomously. These organisations include non-profit organisations, self-help and mutual aid groups, cooperatives, and corporate social responsibility institutions. Social ownership in this context aims to remedy market imperfections, without requiring increased state interventions that restructure economies, so they produce more beneficial social outcomes.

In the second approach, the state's role advocates for the transformation of economic structures through state policy tools. These tools include public ownership, state-coordinated industrial policies, comprehensive competition regulations, public procurement strategies,

and oversight of financial capital deployment. This approach utilises state policies to develop and support social ownership models, thereby altering resource allocation, investment patterns, ownership structures, and market dynamics.

The third approach is more transformative. It advances a case for using both social ownership and state policy levers to establish alternative development models. This approach relates social ownership to questions about indigenous community rights, the transformation of global economic imbalances, racial redress, and the decolonisation of knowledge systems. These models are positioned within the context of developing anti-capitalist socio-economic principles. Consequently, the state's role in this context is supporting diverse social ownership structures, which present transformative alternatives to market-led development strategies.

With the development of varieties of 'African socialisms' in the 1960s, socialist principles were merged with African economic and philosophical traditions.

Social ownership in South Africa

In South Africa, there are examples of all types of social ownership. Limited space here precludes a full analysis of these experiences, which are varied and diverse in sector, historical time frame, purpose, and scale. Rather, in this section we briefly illustrate some of the ways in which social ownership has been pursued in practice in South Africa, to what ends, with what success, and with what limitations.

One of the criteria for the definition of social ownership is a focus on public benefit. Here solar energy has been introduced to upgrade amenities in a rural settlement.

Different social ownership models have been pursued for national strategic and developmental objectives (e.g. state-owned entities [SOEs] such as Eskom, Transnet, the Post Office, etc.), to address the legacies of apartheid (e.g. Communal Property Associations [CPAs]), for achieving economies of scale (e.g. agricultural cooperatives), to address economic exclusion and unemployment (e.g. cooperatives, including those established by unions), and as forms of community solidarity and support (e.g. stokvels).

The democratic government inherited hundreds of state-owned entities from the apartheid government who used them "to expand the white Afrikaner middle class through affirmative action, build businesses through favourable procurement, provide jobs for the unemployed and rollout infrastructure in white areas" (Gumede, 2016, p. 69).

Public ownership was part of the liberation agenda from early on, with the call for nationalisation of key industries included in the Freedom Charter[4] and included in the ANC's early policy doctrine. However, this quickly changed after 1994. SOEs became a major site of political and economic contestation between different factions of the state, business, and trade unions in the post-apartheid era, with further influence from international agencies like the World Bank (Gumede, 2016).

The first decade of democracy saw a new framework for the restructuring of SOEs, which resulted in many being privatised, corporatised, and some essential services being outsourced at the local level. In many cases, these were unsuccessful, with the companies being liquidated or resulting in such high tariff increases that many people could no longer afford the services. Gumede (2016) argues that rather than creating competitive companies, privatisation resulted in inefficient and unregulated monopolies, many of which required state bailouts after collapsing.

In the last decade or so, SOEs have suffered huge declines with many reporting year-on-year losses. This has been attributed to the severe impacts of the economic slowdown and the slump in the metals price, leaving these entities with large debt servicing costs on investments made during the boom (Makgetla, 2020). SOEs have also been a key site of state capture (Chipkin & Swilling, 2018). The systemic breaking apart of SOEs and the siphoning off of public funds for private gain has perverted their role for public good and their social ownership mandate and ethos.

CPAs[5] were established in the post-apartheid era in response to the land dispossession of apartheid and colonialism. CPAs are legally recognised and legislated modes of collective land ownership, in which defined communities legally own land and manage it under democratic governance and a written constitution. The CPA model came out of a long

history of activists, lawyers, and land users workshopping and considering the best ways to manage restituted land in the new South Africa, aimed at balancing communal rights with individual and family rights (Weinberg, 2021). Despite these efforts, CPAs have become a cut-and-paste model that has rarely been adequately fitted to local contexts and has faced numerous difficulties.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development's CPA Annual Report cites issues with membership, limited management and governance skills, and corruption and crime as the biggest challenges facing CPAs. Other work has also cited a lack of government support and oversight, the exclusion of women, youth, and labour tenants, and conflicts amongst members (Weinberg, 2021; Hall 2009; Lahiff, 2009). This has raised the question of whether the role of CPAs is limited to land restitution, or whether they can or should "play a role in correcting the wrongs of South Africa's exclusionary property system as a whole" (Weinberg, 2021, p. 16). Additionally, while CPAs were instituted to address issues of land ownership, they necessarily became enmeshed in the economic livelihoods that people derive from land which has produced complex outcomes, with limited impact on improving individual well-being (Hall, 2009).

South Africa's cooperative experience is hugely varied. During apartheid, agricultural cooperatives played an outsize role in the economy and were vital in supporting white farmers, ensuring the economic success and sustainability of white-owned agriculture businesses (Amin & Bernstein, 1995; Satgar, 2011). According to Ortmann & King (2007), agricultural cooperatives were used in: "1) the purchase and sale of agricultural inputs and equipment; 2) the purchase, storage and subsequent sale of agricultural commodities; and 3) transport services" (p. 24). In addition, white farmers were supported with access to land, credit, and the services of the marketing boards. Towards the end of

apartheid, the liberalisation of the agricultural sector and removal of subsidies meant these cooperatives lost a lot of their institutional power and cooperative nature, and many were ultimately converted into profit-oriented firms. Given the ways in which these models were used to entrench and uphold the apartheid state and white supremacy, Satgar & Williams (2012) argue that "emulating the Afrikaner empowerment approach does not engender genuine cooperative development but rather abuses the cooperative form for perverse forms of economic development" (p. 202).

Public ownership was part of the liberation agenda from early on, with the call for nationalisation of key industries included in the Freedom Charter and included in the ANC's early policy doctrine.

There has been a concerted effort in South Africa, including by the state, to develop cooperatives to boost local economic development and broader participation in the economy. However, some have argued that these efforts have not been particularly successful (Okem, 2016). In 2010, the Department of Trade and Industry reported that most cooperatives set up had failed due to a lack of understanding of how cooperatives are governed, dependence on donors, and a lack of business opportunities and marketing skills (Okem, 2016).

Trade unions have also played a significant role in promoting cooperatives. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the National Union of Mineworkers established a cooperative programme in response to layoffs which retrenched tens of thousands of workers. Kate Philip's (2018) analysis of this programme tracked some of its challenges − labour over-supply, inadequate investment in operational needs, failures in

conducting adequate market feasibility studies, and weak governance and management.

By far the most prevalent form of social ownership in South Africa, in terms of active involvement, are stokvels. Stokvels are group savings or credit associations, where members contribute a fixed amount at regular intervals and subsequently can draw money at set times or intervals (Lukhele, 1990). Estimates suggest that up to 11 million South Africans are members of at least one stokvel (NASASA, 2025), with historically more women than men participating (Verhoef, 2001). Depending on their purpose and the way the rotation and payments are structured, stokvels may be used for big life events (weddings, births, and most commonly, funerals), annual spending (festive season, school fees), times where large investments are required (buying furniture, house building), emergencies, or simply subsistence and groceries (Irving, 2005). Research on stokvels shows that they are an essential form of community-building, solidarity, wealth pooling, and survival for many communities, especially economically marginalised ones (Verhoef, 2001; Matuku & Kaseke, 2014). They provide key sources of credit and social security for those excluded from formal financial institutions (Verhoef, 2001; Dube & Pretorius, 2020), or where these institutions are considered untrustworthy or too expensive (Irving, 2005).

All these social ownership models do have successes in pursuing outcomes of public good. But they are also plagued by many of the same issues. Across the board, social ownership models face challenges with implementing democratic and good governance. This is as true for SOEs as it is for cooperatives and CPAs, albeit for different reasons and at different scales. Yet, democratic governance and involvement in decision-making is fundamental to the principle of social ownership and the stated objective and functioning of these models. These weaknesses have in turn made many organisations susceptible to elite capture, and a means of

concentrating or siphoning off wealth, resources, or control to an elite group. Challenges also exist in terms of who is included and excluded.

Who gets to be included in a 'community' can be defined by exclusionary principles or practices, leading to conflicts amongst members, disputes over benefit sharing, and even at the level of the state, over who has a right to claim access to services (Sobuwa, 2025). And lastly, many of these models face issues of financial sustainability, particularly those reliant on external funding rather than internally driven mechanisms (such as stokvels).

The difficulties faced by social ownership organisations is not only due to their internal challenges, but is also linked to the environment in which they are expected to operate − limited access to finance, competition from monopoly corporates, a poor educational and skills development framework, and a neoliberal system which has systematically pressured the corporatisation of all kinds of social ownership models (Satgar & Williams, 2011).

And yet these models persist, sometimes through their own resilience and the persistence of communities, other times because they remain the best model we have despite these difficulties, or sometimes because their strategic and developmental importance remains (Makgetla, 2020). And their social good should not be minimised − Eskom led the electrification of millions of Black households and continues to play a redistributive function (Department of Minerals and Energy, 2001), stokvels provide solidarity and informal mechanisms of social security and credit access for millions of people, and CPAs provided access to land for those previously dispossessed, just to name a few.

Solar mini grid, Johannesburg.
Photo: Katrina Lehmann-Grube

Conclusion: Social ownership and inequality

The concept of social ownership cannot be allowed to be diluted to the point where it no longer holds any meaning. And it should not be used as a residual response to the privatisation and corporatisation of South Africa's transition. In this article, we have put forward a definition of social ownership that aims to challenge some of the policy discussions that have diluted its meaning and potential. We argue the key characteristics of social ownership include a collective ownership structure, the pursuit of public benefit, democratic control of decision-making, and an ethic of cooperation or solidarity. We have discussed different models of social ownership, outlined the history of the concept, and considered the way in which it has already been practiced in South Africa, with all its flaws.

Social ownership models are not new in South Africa. There are contemporary and historic examples from which we can draw lessons. Many of these are also directly relevant to the transition. CPAs may host renewable energy projects and earn rents (e.g. Droogfontein Pty Ltd, 2026); mine worker cooperatives may be directly impacted through the transitions in their sectors; SOEs such as Eskom are clearly central to the decarbonisation of our electricity supply; municipally-owned renewable energy projects are becoming more prevalent in large metros (Evans, 2024), and the stokvel model is even being used to develop community-owned solar sources (Pakati & Molelekwa, 2025).

Rather than seeing social ownership as something new within the just transition, we should consider the ways in which the principles of social ownership within these organisations and models can be strengthened and held accountable. It is important that the state plays an active role, both by pursuing social ownership directly, and by creating a conducive macroeconomic and policy context which ameliorates the structural barriers facing these models.

The key indicator of a successful social ownership model is its public benefit and social return, but we should be transparent and cognisant about their challenges in practice. A lot is asked of social ownership systems. They are expected to redistribute wealth and resources, provide services, correct historical wrongs, build community and solidarity, while at the same time being financially sustainable, efficient, and democratically managed. This is a tall order, in the context of high inequality, almost no economic growth, an unsupportive international financial and institutional architecture, and the entrenchment and expansion of capitalist modes of production. However, these goals remain worthy, including in the context of climate change and the transition. And they cannot be left to the private sector, because they remain as pertinent as ever and capital will not prioritise these objectives.

While the resurgence of social ownership has been applied almost exclusively to the renewable energy sector, a just transition requires an economy-wide transition which addresses fundamental challenges to South African society, such as inequality, poverty, and unemployment. The underlying objectives of social ownership for deconcentrating wealth and ownership over the means of production mean that it can be applied much more broadly to achieve a more just and equal society.

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ENDNOTES

[1] REIPPPP was announced in 2011 and was the first large-scale renewable energy programme in South Africa, as well as the first introduction of significant private generators of electricity. It is a competitive auction process whereby private companies bid to produce electricity using various technologies (mainly wind and solar). The selected bids then enter into 20-year contracts with Eskom who has to buy the electricity at the set price.

[2] The state of Yugoslavia was formed in 1918, becoming the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963. It was made up of six republics including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. The federal state started dissolving in the early 1990s with the Yugoslav wars, and each state is independent as of 2006.

[3] TANU was the foremost liberation party of the former Tanganyika (now Tanzania). It was formed in 1954 by Julius Nyerere who later become the first President of independent Tanzania.

[4] "The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the Banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole" (*Freedom Charter*, 1955).

[5] There were also other forms of collective land ownership both historically and presently – such as community trusts and land ownership committees (Weinberg, 2021). However, here we focus on CPAs as one particularly significant model of collective land ownership established specifically to address the land dispossessions during apartheid.

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