

Terms of Reference (ToR): Policy and Research Consultant

Project title: Making Mission 300 Work for the Last Mile - Insights from Locally-Owned Energy Distributors

1. Background

Global Distributors Collective is a collective of over 300 last mile distributors (LMDs) operating in 60+ countries, reaching an estimated 64.5 million people. The majority of these enterprises are locally owned (88%) and nearly half are women-led (47%), serving predominantly rural and low-income populations.

LMDs play a critical role in delivering first-time energy access and clean cooking solutions. However, despite their reach and impact, they face persistent structural barriers, particularly in accessing finance, and are often excluded from large-scale initiatives.

The Mission 300 aims to accelerate energy access for 300 million people, including 125 million in underserved African contexts where distributed renewable energy is often the most viable solution. However, current financing mechanisms risk overlooking smaller, locally led distributors, limiting the initiative's effectiveness and inclusivity.

Building on insights from the GDC State of the Sector 2025 report, this research will generate actionable recommendations to ensure that Mission 300 financing mechanisms are inclusive, effective, and aligned with the needs of LMDs.

2. Objectives

- Capture first-hand insights and lessons learned from LMDs engaging with large-scale programmes (e.g. World Bank initiatives) and make these voices heard.
- Map Mission 300 financing mechanisms and country-level compacts.
- Identify gaps and barriers affecting LMD participation, particularly for smaller, locally owned, and women-led enterprises.
- Develop actionable recommendations for funders, governments, partners and LMDs.
- Support LMD inclusion through targeted advocacy and dissemination.
- Equip GDC members – and other LMDs - with guidance on engaging with large-scale programmes such as Mission 300.

3. Duration and Level of Effort

- **Duration:** May – October
- **Level of effort:** circa 35 days
- **Total budget:** £17,000

4. Scope of Work and Activities

The Policy and Research Consultant will work closely and collaboratively with a researcher from the GDC team to complete the assignment, which will be delivered over **six months** across **four work packages**:

Work Package 1: Mapping and Desk Review: Months 1–2 (May-June)

Key Activities:

- Map financing mechanisms linked to Mission 300, including:
 - Grants
 - Results-based financing (RBF)
 - Debt and equity instruments
- Review:
 - Policy and programme documents
 - Existing sector research
 - GDC datasets and insights
- Conduct interviews with LMDs engaged in programmes led by institutions such as the World Bank

Work Package 2: Analysis Mechanisms and Identify Gaps: Months 2–4 (June-Aug)

Key Activities:

- Review LMDs' funding needs:
 - Ticket sizes
 - Concessionality
 - Sources e.g. local currency
- Assess financing mechanisms based on:
 - Inclusivity
 - Accessibility
 - Effectiveness in meeting LMDs' funding needs
- Identify key barriers, including:
 - Eligibility constraints
 - Ticket sizes
 - Administrative complexity
 - Gender-related barriers
- Analyse disparities affecting:
 - Smaller enterprises
 - Locally owned businesses
 - Women-led distributors

Work Package 3: Recommendations and White Paper Development: Months 4–5 (Aug-Sept)

Key Activities:

- Develop practical recommendations for:
 - Funders and donors
 - Governments
 - Programme implementers
- Identify opportunities for improved coordination across:
 - Donors

- Investors
- Governments
- Intermediaries e.g. GOGLA, Global Platform for Action (GPA)

Work Package 4: Stakeholder Convening and Dissemination: Months 5–6 (Sept-Oct)

Key Activities:

- Convene a multi-stakeholder roundtable to:
 - Validate findings
 - Test recommendations
 - Build buy-in among key actors
- Develop targeted dissemination and advocacy materials:
 - Public report
 - Funder brief
 - Advocacy messages
 - Programme design guidance
- Share findings with GDC members and provide practical guidance on engaging with Mission 300

5. Deliverables

- Final research report / white paper
- Funder brief and policy recommendations
- Stakeholder workshop(s) and summary report
- GDC member guidance materials
- Additional outputs to be defined at project inception

6. Governance and Management

- The project will be overseen by Head of the GDC
- A steering group may be established including key partners and sector stakeholders
- Regular progress check-ins (biweekly/monthly) will be held

7. Desirable Qualities for the Consultant

A) Sector Knowledge and Experience

- Deep understanding of **last mile distribution, energy access, and/or clean cooking markets** in emerging economies.
- Familiarity with **financing mechanisms for SMEs and small enterprises** (grants, RBF, debt, equity).
- Experience engaging with **large-scale energy access programmes or donor initiatives** (e.g., Mission 300, World Bank, DFIs).
- Knowledge of **locally-led business models and gender inclusion** in the energy access sector.

B) Research and Analytical Skills

- Strong **qualitative and quantitative research skills**, including conducting virtual interviews, desk reviews, and data synthesis.
- Ability to **translate complex insights into practical, actionable recommendations**, tailored for different stakeholders.
- Experience in **policy analysis, gap analysis, or programme evaluation**.

C) Stakeholder Engagement and Facilitation

- Proven ability to **build trust and engage with diverse stakeholders**, including local entrepreneurs, government officials, funders, and NGOs.
- Skilled in **facilitating workshops, roundtables, or multi-stakeholder convenings**.
- Effective **communication and negotiation skills**, including handling sensitive or politically complex issues.

D) Strategic Thinking

- Capacity to **see the big picture** and understand ecosystem-level dynamics.
- Ability to **identify opportunities for coordination, advocacy, and influence** within multi-actor systems.
- Creative in proposing **innovative solutions to structural barriers** facing LMDs.

E) Practical Orientation and Delivery Focus

- Strong **results-driven mindset**, able to produce outputs on time and within budget.
- Hands-on approach with **attention to operational feasibility** of recommendations.
- Comfort working in **ambiguous or data-sparse contexts**, able to make evidence-informed judgments.

F) Interpersonal and Professional Attributes

- Strong **collaboration and teamwork skills**, able to work with colleagues at GDC, Practical Action, Bopinc, and other partners.
- High **cultural sensitivity**, especially in engaging rural, low-income, and women-led businesses.
- Excellent **written and verbal communication**, able to produce reports, briefs, and presentations for diverse audiences.

G) Technical Skills

- Proficiency in **MS Office / Excel / PowerPoint**, data visualisation, and reporting tools.

H) Regional Experience (optional but strongly preferred)

- Previous work in **sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, or similar contexts**.
- Knowledge of **local energy markets, policy frameworks, and distribution ecosystems**.

8. How to Apply

Send your CV, day rate and a short covering email - or maximum one A4 page motivational statement - to GDC@practicalaction.org.uk, with subject line **GDC Policy and Research Consultant**, by 9am BST on Friday 15th May 2026.