



“Instead of waiting for disasters and then scrambling for funding, we need to create resilience from the start.”

A Conversation with Rik Stamhuis of [Jiro-Ve](#)

Sanne Breimer

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Sanne Breimer: Please introduce yourself and share details about your work, including when the venture was founded.

Rik Stamhuis: My name is Rik Stamhuis. I'm the co-founder and managing director of Jiro-Ve, a Malagasy social enterprise founded in 2014. Our mission is to make renewable energy accessible to everyone in Madagascar. We started by implementing a flexible rental model for solar products. We've greatly benefited from our partnership with Rippleworks while working in Madagascar.

Sanne Breimer: Was the support you received from Rippleworks primarily capacity-building for your project, or did it also include a loan or funding?

Rik Stamhuis: No, our collaboration has been solely in the form of capacity building. The process involved us presenting a problem, and Rippleworks identifying an expert in that field who then worked with us to address it. This approach has been highly effective and greatly beneficial to us.

Since then, we have completed two additional projects with them. One focused on training our staff in management skills. The most recent project provided mentorship and coaching, allowing us to regularly check in with an expert who guided us through challenges, connected us with relevant people within the Rippleworks ecosystem and beyond, and helped us explore potential solutions.

Sanne Breimer: Great. Can you share an example that illustrates the impact of your work? How do you measure its success, and what aspects of your approach have contributed to that impact?

Rik Stamhuis: Yes, we focus on last-mile energy access, serving people who typically earn less than \$2 a day. Many rely on hazardous energy sources like kerosene and

candles for lighting, which pose serious health risks and are costly. Instead, we provide a solar rental service through trained local entrepreneurs who deliver solar products directly to users' doorsteps. These customers rent the products daily for less than they used to spend on kerosene and candles, gaining a safer, brighter, and more affordable alternative.

Beyond household lighting, we've expanded our model to partner with NGOs and electrify local schools. We equip schools with solar systems and integrate digital learning tools, improving educational resources for students. Additionally, we train teachers to use these tools effectively.

Another key initiative we've introduced is clean cooking. Many schools still rely on wood and charcoal for cooking, exposing students and parents—who often prepare meals—to harmful smoke. By adapting our solar systems for clean cooking, we're making school environments healthier and safer. These initiatives illustrate how our model not only improves energy access but also enhances education and public health, driving broader community impact.

Sanne Breimer: Do the schools pay for the service, or is it covered in another way?

Rik Stamhuis: We operate on a hybrid model that includes both commercial and non-commercial services. For example, digital learning tools are not currently a commercial service. We see a clear need for them to support the long-term success of these communities. By offering both commercial and non-commercial services, we strengthen our connection with the community through our local entrepreneurs. This relationship allows us to introduce additional non-commercial services, which we currently sustain through grant funding.

Sanne Breimer: You mentioned grants. Could you explain the funding you're receiving at the moment? How does your business model work in that regard?

Rik Stamhuis: On the commercial side, our end customers pay a daily rental fee, which helps cover overhead costs and sustain the service. However, to establish the necessary infrastructure, we rely on grants to ensure communities can access clean energy. Essentially, our model is set up so that grants fund the initial capital expenditures (CapEx) to launch the service, and then our commercial operations generate revenue to maintain it.

We receive a combination of grants. Until recently, USAID was partially supporting us, which significantly helped improve our model. Unfortunately, there has been a change on that front. Additionally, we have an angel investor who has helped us expand, and by

the end of this month, we will have electrified roughly 70 schools. We also collaborate with larger NGOs that support our work.

We have approximately 35 full-time staff members, along with a growing network of local entrepreneurs. Currently, we have around 150 entrepreneurs, but we expect that number to reach 200 within the next three months.

Sanne Breimer: A quick question about the impact of USAID. What do you think makes a funding system resilient, and how can funders help you maintain resilience?

Rik Stamhuis: The funding allowed us to develop, test, and prove our model. Without it, we couldn't have taken the risk of reaching remote areas, where costs rise quickly and returns aren't guaranteed. The grant funding enabled us to get started and refine our approach along the way. To give you an idea, USAID provided between \$400K and \$500K, which we leveraged to secure an additional \$2 million in funding. That's how it should work—grants should unlock further investment. Our model is the combination of commercial and non-commercial services, as well as the integration of different sectors—private companies, NGOs, and government.

As for community resilience, initial subsidies are essential, especially for public schools. Ideally, the government would fund this infrastructure, but even when it does, sustainability is often lacking. That's where our model comes in—we don't just deploy infrastructure; we ensure it remains operational and benefits the community long-term.

Sanne Breimer: Thinking about the support you've received in general, what's something that surprised you and turned out to help scale your business?

Rik Stamhuis: The funding landscape in Madagascar has been very underdeveloped, and one of the most significant breakthroughs for us was the establishment of Miarakap, the country's first investment fund. They became a catalyst by breaking large chunks of finance into smaller, more accessible amounts for companies like ours. Their involvement has been instrumental in designing and shaping funding programs that better support local entrepreneurs.

We had already been working closely with them, but Madagascar has historically been a challenging place to raise financing. Unlike East Africa, where funding ecosystems are more developed, working in Madagascar means being far removed from major funding sources. The lack of an established support system for local entrepreneurs made it difficult to access investment. Miarakap's presence has been a crucial first building block in unlocking new funding opportunities and helping businesses like ours grow.

Sanne Breimer: When it comes to Rippleworks and the capacity-building support you received, how does their approach to identifying and providing support differ from other experiences you've had, and what impact did it have on your work?

Rik Stamhuis: Rippleworks takes a highly pragmatic and hands-on approach. They start by asking, 'What is your biggest challenge right now?' and make that the focal point. They help you clearly articulate your needs and then match you with the right experts who can provide tailored support. What makes their approach so valuable is how purposeful it is. It's not a one-size-fits-all program; they ensure that the support provided is the best possible fit for your specific challenges. That level of customization has been incredibly impactful for us

Sanne Breimer: Did you feel that the expert you were connected with was a good fit? Could you share a bit more about that experience?

Rik Stamhuis: Yes. Our goal was to find a new ERP/CRM system that suited our needs. Because of the unique nature of our work, it was difficult to find an existing platform that was both a functional and economical fit. Many platforms required significant modifications to align with our model, but larger providers weren't willing to customize their systems for just one organization. Additionally, outsourcing those modifications would have meant paying for changes while the intellectual property (IP) remained with the provider, limiting our flexibility to make adjustments as needed.

Through Rippleworks, we identified a platform that balanced both fixed components, such as accounting and inventory, which we didn't need to develop from scratch, and customizable elements that we could adapt to our specific needs. Their support helped us find the right partner and smoothly transition from our previous system to the new one.

It was helpful to have an expert who had been there, done that, and knew exactly what we were dealing with. Like you said, you take a leap of faith and step into the unknown. Being able to work with someone who had already seen it all helped us pave the way forward.

Sanne Breimer: Were there any gaps in the support model you received?

Rik Stamhuis: I think what naturally happened on our end was quite fascinating. Our expert was primarily focused on the inventory side of things. At the same time, I was already working with MovingWorlds, another platform that connects organizations with experts. There, you can post a problem you're facing, and experts can apply to help. By coincidence, someone from MovingWorlds applied, and I brought both experts together.

That was the challenge, when transitioning, you have to consider both inventory and accounting, as they are closely linked. Fortunately, we ended up forming a team that worked together seamlessly across both areas, which turned out to be a great experience.

Sanne Breimer: What do you think funders don't understand about capacity building that would be useful for them to know?

Rik Stamhuis: When funders support a company in any field we operate in, both financial funding and capacity building are equally important. Of course, without funding, little can be done, but it's also in the best interest of funders to ensure that their investment is used effectively. That's where technical assistance becomes crucial—it helps entrepreneurs maximize the impact of the funding they receive. In my opinion, these two elements should always go hand in hand.

That said, it's important to keep the process lean and straightforward. I've received technical assistance before, but one major challenge is when the funding and technical assistance are handled separately. For example, after submitting a business plan and receiving funding, I then had to apply separately for technical assistance. That created unnecessary bureaucracy and doubled the work. In fact, in one case, securing funding for my business was less work than applying for technical assistance, even though the technical assistance was only a fraction of the total funding. That simply doesn't make sense—it becomes a distraction rather than a support system.

Funders should bundle technical assistance with financial support from the outset. Instead of requiring a separate application, funders should clearly define how much of the funding package is allocated to technical assistance and ensure it's easily accessible. Rippleworks could play a big role in streamlining this by becoming a direct technical assistance partner for funders looking to invest in businesses.

Another major issue is that many funders don't collaborate because they see each other as competitors. This makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to secure continuous funding. Often, you receive funding from one source, but that funder can only take you so far, and finding the next step is challenging. A neutral organization like Rippleworks could bridge that gap by helping entrepreneurs navigate funding stages and connecting them to the right partners for their next funding need.

There are already organizations working in this space. One example is MovingWorlds, which allows companies to post challenges online and connect with experts willing to help. Another example is the Miller Center, which offers structured curriculum-based programs. I recently introduced Rippleworks to Miller Center in Kenya, as I see a strong potential for collaboration. Miller Center provides a structured program, while

Rippleworks offers tailored, adaptive support for specific needs. When entrepreneurs go through Miller Center's program, Rippleworks could step in to address the precise challenges they face. Likewise, Rippleworks could benefit from Miller Center's vast database of skilled mentors by tapping into their network when seeking experts in specific fields. This kind of collaboration would make technical assistance even more effective and accessible, ensuring that entrepreneurs get the right support at the right time.

Sanne Breimer: What about the clean energy sector specifically? Has this type of support been particularly helpful for clean energy, or is there any sector-specific aspect to it?

Rik Stamhuis: Yes, absolutely—100%. But what's great about Rippleworks is that their model isn't limited to one sector; it's useful across industries, not just clean energy. One example of this is how Rippleworks connected us with another organization they were working with, focused on digitizing schools. Through that connection, we started collaborating and have now integrated their tablets into our schools. That's an example of how Rippleworks facilitates valuable connections, which, in our case, turned into a meaningful partnership.

Sanne Breimer: You mentioned skills development for your team, including staff training in management skills and coaching. Could you tell me a bit more about that

Rik Stamhuis: Two team members received training, one is in charge of our team of technicians, and the other is our operations manager. Both benefited greatly, and I've seen them step up and apply the skills they learned during the course. A great example is that one of them recently asked for more responsibilities at the management level. I see that as a testament to the confidence they gained through the training. They really took charge of the process themselves. I simply connected them. I'm not sure who led that specific training, but I can find out. What also made a big difference was that the training was provided in French, which was extremely helpful.

Sanne Breimer: What would you say has been the biggest challenge in the support you've received?

Rik Stamhuis: There was a contact person within Rippleworks who kept an open line of communication with us. I understand what they were trying to achieve, and I can see the value in having someone as a central connection to different people within the Rippleworks ecosystem. However, I think for it to be more effective, the interactions should be more frequent. When there's too much time between check-ins, the conversation can lose momentum, and things tend to slip off the radar. That said, I

really appreciate how Rippleworks continuously looks for ways to improve, this interview itself is a great example of that. Overall, they've always been great in that regard, and increasing the frequency of interactions would only enhance the impact of their support.

Sanne Breimer: What advice would you give to funders who want to help social ventures succeed?

Rik Stamhuis: It's really important to first and foremost appreciate just how difficult it is to operate in these environments. Things will likely take longer than expected, and challenges will arise. Funders need to be patient, supportive, and flexible while also accepting that there is inherent risk in this work.

At the same time, we have to recognize that what we're doing is still not enough. The scale of the challenges we face is enormous, and unfortunately, funding for these efforts is decreasing. Now more than ever, we need more support—not less. So while patience and flexibility are crucial, we also have to push for long-term solutions. We shouldn't accept the status quo. The goal should always be to help communities become self-sufficient. Whether it's emergency aid for a crisis or long-term development, there should always be a plan in place to move beyond immediate relief.

For example, right now, a cyclone is expected to hit southern Madagascar. We work in those areas, and instead of waiting for disaster relief efforts after the fact, we're already preparing communities—protecting our equipment and spreading awareness before the storm arrives. This proactive approach is key. Instead of waiting for disasters to strike and then scrambling for emergency funding, we need to think ahead and create resilience from the start.

Sanne Breimer: What are the top three things you need to unlock your ability to scale and sustain your impact?

Rik Stamhuis: I'm an entrepreneur, so it's always going to be funding. The second is partnerships, working together with governments and NGOs to help communities transition toward more resilient models. The third is spreading the message that this path exists. There's plenty for everyone, but the world is stuck in a narrative that resources are so constrained that people feel they must only look after themselves.

I think we need a new way of looking at things. One that recognizes the potential for greater prosperity, especially with the technological revolutions happening now. We should use these advancements to benefit everyone, not just a select few. If wealth is distributed properly, there's no reason for one part of the world to be in a dire state. It's about being smart in unlocking and using these innovations to support those who need them most.

Sanne Breimer: How did you come up with the idea for this business?

Rik Stamhuis: It came from realizing that the current approach just isn't good enough. Many people say they want to serve the communities we work with, but in reality, they often start with that intention and then give up when they realize how difficult it is. They end up shifting their focus to serving those who are better off instead. To me, that's not good enough. If we truly want to build a sustainable world, we have a responsibility to support these communities as well—especially since they often live closest to the remaining areas of high biodiversity. Ignoring their needs puts us all at risk because if these forests and ecosystems disappear, the consequences will affect everyone.

Sanne Breimer: Was the renewable energy technology you're using already present in Madagascar?

Rik Stamhuis: We started with solar products, but quickly realized it wasn't enough. Providing clean solar products helps, but it won't help the community thrive sustainably on its own. That's why we focus on leveraging what we've built and bringing in more partners to drive broader development. In the end, we must help these communities develop sustainably—helping them thrive while living in harmony with their environment.

Sanne Breimer: Thanks so much for your time.

Sanne Breimer (she/her) is a freelance journalism trainer, project manager, and adviser for international media organizations including SembraMedia, Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF), European Journalism Centre, Thibi, and the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU). She founded Inclusive Journalism, aiming to educate (primarily) Western journalists about media representation and decolonization through a weekly newsletter, online courses, and retreats. Sanne works remotely and divides her time between Europe and South East Asia. Before moving into training, Sanne worked at a managerial level in national public broadcasting in the Netherlands for almost 13 years, focusing on radio, digital media, and innovation. She is Dutch with Frisian roots.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*