



# County Update 1

## Strategic Partnership for Women Entrepreneurs' Participation in Small- Scale Renewable Energy Solutions and Value Chains

### Bomet & Homa Bay Counties

#### Provided by



CUTS Africa Resource Centre, Nairobi

<http://www.cuts-international.org/ARC/Nairobi/>

### Introduction

This county update note presents the views of stakeholders in renewable energy (RE) concerning empowering women to participate in RE value chains (VCs) with a focus on small-scale RE solutions. The note is based on data collected from stakeholders through key informant interviews, telephone calls, electronic communications, and field visits. The stakeholders were sampled from the following institutions:

- Energy and Regulatory Commission (ERC),
- Kenya Climate Change Working Group (KCCWG),
- African Energy Policy Research Network (AFPEN),
- African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS), and
- The African Women's Community and Development Network (FEMNET).

### Rationale for Women Participation

Gender equality, renewable and clean energy are some of the prerequisites for sustainable development as envisioned in the *Sustainable Development Agenda 2030*<sup>1</sup>. Globally women play a crucial role in scaling up access to energy, given their societal role as the household managers. As household energy managers and through their networks, women are in a unique position to connect with their peers, increase awareness, demand and deliver energy products and services. At the same time, addressing women's energy needs is a precondition for poverty eradication. Women are active change agents in the

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<sup>1</sup> United Nation, "Sustainable Development Goals 2030"

energy sector with selling, maintaining and financing energy products and services<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, when small-scale women entrepreneurs or workers get access to clean energy, they stand to benefit tremendously through increased productivity and lowered costs, resulting in increased incomes. This has potential to directly benefit their families and the local community or society. Investment in the energy sector also has indirect positive effects on the education, health and nutrition of households, through the provision of lighting and heat (ESMAP, 2013). To this end, engaging women in clean energy VCs is an integrated development solution, which can enhance adoption of clean energy technologies and have catalytic impacts on pro-poor growth.

## Opportunities for Women's Involvement in Renewable Energy

Decentralization of clean energy systems at the community level offers a great opportunity for women empowerment. At this level, women are more likely to participate in decision-making and be involved in the various energy VCs. Women also have unique societal and cultural understandings and can reach new consumer segments, while also being effective agents of awareness to other women about the benefits of using clean energy products for cooking and lighting. Furthermore, women can be partners and agents of behaviour change at the grassroots levels and their engagement in the energy value chains can lead to greater women economic empowerment at this level. Ultimately, women's economic empowerment

<sup>2</sup> Nelson S., & Kuriakose A. (2017), "Gender and Renewable Energy: Entry Points for Women's Livelihoods and Employment."

can boost productivity, promote development of consumer markets, and enhance overall sustainable development. Through supporting women's economic empowerment, it creates an incredible opportunity to impact pro-poor growth and change the landscape of sustainable development.

## Current level of Involvement of Women in Renewable Energy Value Chains

Currently, women are less involved in the RE VCs in Kenya. According to Global Village Partnership (2015), 56 per cent of entrepreneurs in the energy sector are male and only 42 per cent are female. Women have been excluded from development of energy projects; they are also not targeted in technical training and financing even though they are mainly the ones responsible for household energy provision, and the final end-users of household energy products.

In Kenya, few women are involved in large and medium-scale RE production and use. Most women are involved in small-scale renewables particularly in the biofuels segment and to a lesser extent in the solar segment, primarily in the retailing end of the value chain (UNIDO, 2014). At a small scale, women are also the biggest consumers of renewable energy, using solar lanterns, biomass cook stoves and other solar home systems. Currently, these are mainly provided courtesy of companies like M-kopa and D-light. For other renewables like biogas, women may have a say and role in management but often overall decision making lies with men who own the cattle and the land. For briquettes, solar and mini-grids associated costs may hinder women's participation especially for the large-scale ones.

The low level of involvement of women can be explained by capacity gaps. According to a

recent study by Global Village Energy Partnership (GVEP), women are not well equipped with technical skills needed for installation and maintenance of renewable energy technologies such as solar systems (Kariuki and Balla, 2015).

## Policy and Institutional Frameworks

The current policies like the National Energy and Petroleum Policy promise to mainstream gender in the energy sector both in the short and long-term. However, it does not explicitly mention how women will be involved in the renewable energy value chains. Additionally, Kenya's energy policy focuses mostly on large-scale renewable energy (geothermal, hydro, wind) with little focus on and/or investment in household level renewable energy options.

At the county level, some counties are yet to develop energy policies and still rely on the national policy which is gender-blind. Homa-Bay and Bomet Counties, for instance, still do not have specific renewable energy policies. In Homa-Bay, the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) is used as the framework for planning and development of the energy sector. The CIDP has not explicitly addressed the issue of women's involvement in renewable energy value chain. Although the CIDP recognizes the importance of developing RE, it lacks adequate strategies to facilitate women to have access to renewable energy services. In Bomet, the county has just initiated the process of developing its own energy policy. The policy will mainstream gender issues in renewable energy and propose clearly defined strategies for enhancing access to RE services by women.

The existing policies are still not explicit on women's participation, focusing only on the type of renewable energy. Even though there

are efforts to engage women in use of energy saving cook stoves, for example, this does not apply to the other renewables where fewer women are directly involved in conceptualization, use and even sale of renewable energy.

## Opportunities for Integrating Women



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Women ought to be involved right from conceptualization to ensure women's needs are well captured at all levels and are reaping benefits from investments in the energy sector. To this end, **women should be allowed to play leadership roles at all levels of the energy value chain.** Evidence from other sectors suggest that integrating women into all levels of the energy value chain will lead to more effective clean energy initiatives, unlock greater return on investments, and expand the prospects of access to sustainable energy. This also helps enhance capacity for example, through better understanding of technologies and acquisition of skills to fabricate and maintain RE appliances among others, thereby promoting uptake of renewable energy.

Another opportunity lies in the **integration of women in the retail and distribution ends of the RE value chains** given women's eminence in household affairs. This can be achieved through use of Retailer Network (supplier(s) of energy products who

establishes business links with women entrepreneurs running retail outlets in rural trading centers or villages).

In Kenya, most of the experts in the energy sector are male. Women lack the much needed expertise and there is need to support and encourage them to take up technical courses, by **developing and operationalizing capacity development programmes (scholarships, mentoring, internships and others) that will enhance the skills, knowledge and employability of women in the energy sector.** This will encourage women to participate in the RE value chains as experts rather than just consumers of energy products.

There ought to be efforts to engage women through cooperatives i.e. *chamas* by **creating special fund for women in order to encourage them to venture into RE businesses.** Since women's participation in *chamas* is highest, it would be an effective channel for women to participate in renewable energy value chain, create awareness among their peers and distribute RE technologies to members.

## Key Barriers

**Lack the technical expertise in the renewable energy sector:** There are fewer women with the technical training required to participate in some aspects of RE value chains, for example, solar panel installation.

**Social barriers that hinder women's participation in renewable energy:** Culturally, there are some jobs that are considered as "meant" for men. An example is doing rooftop solar installations. Even so, there is a slight shift towards higher participation by women in this area in the recent past. Another social barrier has to do with the fact that men typically make key investment decisions within the household. As

such, if the man fails to see the value of purchasing RE gadgets such as solar lamps, it acts as a barrier to women's uptake of RE.

**Gender-biased access to capital:** Often, women have to deal with specific challenges that are related to their gender ranging from limited access to financial capital. However, in recent times, more financing options are becoming available to women for instance, through the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) which can be used for starting or scaling up businesses. The Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) further provides more business opportunities to women. However, it is not clear how these policy reforms have impacted on women entrepreneurs including the ones in the renewable energy sub-sector.

**Biased emphasis on Large-Scale as opposed to Small-Scale RE generation:** In the recent past, the government has mainly focused on large scale renewable energy for generation of electricity (i.e. geothermal, wind and solar). This largely affects women's participation due to the fact that most women are mostly involved at the household/small-scale level.

**Continued preference of biomass over the modern cooking stoves:** Women entrepreneurs quite often are not able to secure markets modern cook stoves and briquettes due to high preference of traditional biomass. To this end, training on marketing and distribution of RE and energy efficient stoves should be intensified.

## Conclusion

Women are the primary energy managers in households and communities and can be influential actors for change in the transition to sustainable energy. Women should hence be empowered to play a leadership role in promoting and benefiting from sustainable

energy for economic empowerment. Certainly, if renewable energy policy development is gender inclusive and responsive, if social, investment, regulatory and institutional barriers are removed and equal opportunities created for women's entrepreneurship and if women's productive use of renewable energy and essential energy services are promoted, women will play a critical role in scaling up and promoting decentralized renewable energy access and better contribute to local and national sustainable economic and social development.

## Recommendations

- **Training and networking activities for women** for the uptake of renewable energy technologies. This is key even in a context where the legal framework supports gender equality as proper capacity building will lead to economic and financial liberty of women by increasing income-generating opportunities and thus enhance women's social and political status.
- **Promote the involvement of women in income-generating activities through the energy value chain** to empower them economically and to increase their bargaining power in household decision-making. For example, more women should be integrated as employees in companies that sell and lease renewable energy technology and services.
- **Support and share of data gathering to better understand women's practical and productive needs as well as strategic interests and dissemination mechanisms to better reach key stakeholders.** This is very geography-specific and involves gathering data on the gender division of labour, women's access to and control over energy-related resources and women's energy needs. Data gathering and sharing will ultimately help identify how women can be instrumental in making energy projects more effective
- **Create new financing and credit facilities** dedicated to sustainable energy activities by women, in order to promote a greater gender and social equity. Multilateral and bilateral development sources from international and regional development banks should support energy access projects through instruments such as grants and concessional loans specifically targeting women entrepreneurs (appropriated to the size and scalability of their enterprises). Similarly, the private sector should support energy access projects through instruments, such as equity and debt financing targeting this group.
- **Building capacity of women** to work in the clean energy sector as policymakers, designers and managers, in a very male-dominated industry, building capacity of both women and men to tackle the status quo of structural, regulatory and social gender norms simultaneously, promoting an engagement with gender issues in energy solutions
- **Supporting women's career development through training courses and mentorship programmes,** in order to create a group of qualified women able to make an impact on the gender balance in energy institutions and in the private sector.

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This county update note is compiled by CUTS Africa Resource Centre, Nairobi. CUTS' county updates aim to inform individual champions of renewable energy at the county and national government, to update them on the on-going issues related to uptake of renewable energy. The information gathered will also inform the objectives of the multi-stakeholder engagement forums and community meetings. They will be more reactive owing to the fact that they will be responding to trending topics on R.E.

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