

EMPOWERING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS IN HER OWN WORDS.

A Policy Brief Resulting from National Roundtable Events Hosted by Solar Sister Entrepreneurs Nigeria, Ltd. and Solar Sister Tanzania Ltd. and supported by ENERGIA International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy



Background



Solar Sister’s “Empowering Women Entrepreneurs: Barriers and Solutions In Her Own Words” aims to provide information on the opportunities and barriers to engendering the energy transition. Underpinning this policy brief are the voices of the women entrepreneurs themselves, who were included in two national roundtable workshops held in Nigeria and Tanzania.

The purpose of the two national roundtable workshops was to facilitate open dialogue between women energy entrepreneurs and relevant stakeholders to identify and proffer solutions to some barriers affecting women’s active engagement in the energy sector and to address gender equality in the energy sector.

In the words of Dr. Priscilla Achakpa, Special Advisor to the Minister of State for Environment, Nigeria, ***“To advance this role of women in Nigeria’s sustainable energy sector, it is vital that relevant key stakeholders mainstream innovative approaches to proactively engage women in their efforts towards energy access.”***

The workshops brought together industry leaders in Nigeria and Tanzania who are actively seeking to further engage in efforts to advance gender equality in energy access initiatives along with local women entrepreneurs who were able to share their first-hand experiences of working to bring renewable energy access to their communities.

The women entrepreneurs were supported with advocacy training in advance of the events to build their capacity and confidence in speaking their truth of their experiences to powerful audiences.

- The Nigeria event “Enabling Policy and Market environments to support Women Entrepreneurship in the Clean Energy Sector” was held on the 29th of July 2021, at the Wells Carlton Hotel and Apartments, Abuja. This was an advocacy event implemented by Solar Sister and supported by ENERGIA, and ACETAF (African Clean Technology Assistance Facility).
- The Tanzania event “Stimulating productivity and accelerating economic development through gender dimensions of financial inclusion and access to energy” was held on 29 of July 2021. This was an advocacy event hosted by Solar Sister Tanzania, Ltd. and supported by ENERGIA.

Key Messages:

- The global energy transition offers an unprecedented opportunity to transform the energy sector in all aspects – creating a more sustainable, renewable, distributed and decarbonized energy system that provides an array of social and economic benefits, including employment opportunities.
- In order for this tremendous opportunity to be enjoyed by all, a gender perspective must be adopted by policymakers and other stakeholders to ensure that women’s contributions are included.

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- Understanding barriers from the perspective of the women energy entrepreneurs themselves is key to developing policy that will support practical and implementable solutions.
 - Greater gender diversity brings substantial benefits to the energy transition: women bring important perspectives, are primary users of energy, and have deep community ties.
 - Engaging women as active agents in deploying off-grid renewable energy solutions is known to improve sustainability and gender outcomes.
 - Identified barriers for increasing women’s engagement include: perceptions of gender roles, double burden of care and household responsibilities in addition to employment, exclusion from financial services, lack of a supportive work environment.

Current status/trends

The global energy transition offers an unprecedented opportunity to transform the energy sector in all aspects – creating a more sustainable, renewable, distributed, and decarbonized energy system that provides an array of social and economic benefits, including employment opportunities. Currently, the share of women in the renewable energy workforce is 32%, which is an improvement over the share of women in the oil and gas industry of only 22% but is still far from equal representation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) explicitly target both energy access (SDG goal 7) and gender equality and women’s empowerment (SDG goal 5). The two goals are closely interlinked:

SDG Relevant Targets	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy (Goal 7)
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (goal 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased household discretionary spending and savings from the benefit of using lower-cost energy solutions, typically spent on children’s education (including girls), better diet, healthcare, and improved living conditions. • Reduced time, health, and care-giving burdens from improved energy access give women more time for productive endeavors, adult education, empowerment activities, leisure • Access to renewable energy to replace harmful pollution created by burning fossil fuels (kerosene, diesel, wood, charcoal, etc.) for household lighting and energy. Women and children in particular suffer from this form of indoor air pollution. • Access to clean cooking options reduces the burden on women and girls of sexual harassment/assault while gathering wood and fuel.

There has been progress in addressing the gender dimension of energy. Anita Otubu, Head PMU, Nigeria Electrification Project shared that due to the Nigeria Electrification Project, solar productive use of equipment and appliances vendors as well as mini-grid developers are required to embark on gender-targeted marketing to increase women-headed households and to provide micro, small, and medium enterprises access to clean and reliable electricity.

Local women entrepreneurs in particular can play an important role in closing the energy access gap as well as advancing women's participation. According to Olasimbo Sojinrin, Country Director for Solar Sister Nigeria, "By selling, maintaining, and financing sustainable energy products and services, women become active change agents in the energy sector."

There is much to be done, but there is a solid foundation of stakeholders who are supportive of building toward a more inclusive industry for women consumers and participants in the energy transition. In a goodwill message from Rural Electrification Agency (REA), Head PMU, Nigeria Electrification Project, Anita Otubu, said REA is committed towards ensuring that women in the energy sector (both service providers and beneficiaries) are recognized and supported.

Issues of Particular Concern

The following are some of the major factors that need to be addressed to implement a gender approach to manifesting opportunities provided by the energy transition.

Capacity development

Building capacity means bringing together more resources, more people (both women and men) and more skills. Yet, few programs and projects are designed to be inclusive for women. Targeting women for training and capacity building is critical to the sustainability of energy initiatives, particularly in technical and managerial roles to ensure their presence in the decision-making process. According to the women entrepreneurs, this capacity development would improve the quality of women's contribution in the space beyond energy consumers. Women will be more equipped to take on diversified roles in the entire energy chain.

Participation and equity in decision-making

Women are under-represented in energy sector with careers and training in management dominated by men. The energy transition offers a unique opportunity to be more inclusive, as it already has higher women participation. This needs to

translate into higher participation rates of women in senior and management decision levels as well.

Access to Finance

Policies to support financial inclusion for women are necessary to address the gap of funding that women-led businesses encounter. Formal and informal women's organizations and networks can play important and stimulating roles in mobilizing resources for sustainable and equitable energy access projects. According to the women entrepreneurs, grants and loans with less stringent terms and conditions should be available to women entrepreneurs. Simplified processes to access these instruments are required for uptake. There should also be some form of education to help women entrepreneurs understand these processes to improve the eligibility of women entrepreneurs.


Education

According to the women entrepreneurs, the government needs to do more in sensitization and public education on clean energy. Better education would increase the domestic adoption of household clean energy technologies. As communities become more aware of the benefits of clean energy, market demand would increase, translating to more business for women entrepreneurs.

Conflicts, emergencies, security

Conflicts and emergencies exacerbate the issues of energy access and can lead to a double hardship for women. Women and girls may have to travel longer





distances to obtain fuel, and conditions are more dangerous. In Nigeria in particular, participants spoke of current security challenges place a barrier for women to move to their markets to sell their solar lamps and clean cookstoves. This insecurity exists notwithstanding the high demand and energy need of these accessible markets. There is a need for all stakeholders, especially the government, to understand the extended impact of the security issues in the north as it relates to energy in Nigeria.

Climate change and other natural disasters

Women are also disproportionately affected by natural disasters, such as those increasingly being brought on by climate change, as a result of gender inequalities regarding political and economic status, human rights, education, and health. Women have high death rates in disasters, as they often do not receive warnings or other information about hazards and risks. Their mobility in disasters may be restricted or affected due to cultural and social constraints. Gender inequality can complicate and extend the time for women's recovery, for example, if women do not receive timely care for trauma experienced in disasters.



Recommended areas for action

To ensure that the gender perspective is successfully incorporated into energy agenda, it is essential to advocate for the direct involvement of both women and men at all levels: national governments; regional/local governments; communities and civil society organizations; donors; and international organizations. Some actions for each are suggested below:

A. National Governments

Governments need to have a clear commitment to both incorporate energy access programs explicitly into their national development strategies, and to ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into this agenda. Some suggested actions are outlined below:

- ***Mobilize resources to improve access to energy for women***
 - Facilitate access to grants or credit on concessionary terms for women's groups for renewable energy businesses;
 - Allocate resources to civil society organizations and small-scale providers of renewable energy, particularly those that include women as full partners;



- Provide micro-credit and creative alternative financing mechanisms to gender-sensitive organizations for improving or building community-based renewable energy services.
- ***Strengthen legislation and facilitate access to energy for productive uses***
 - Recognize women’s important role in agriculture, livestock, and fisheries, assist them in gaining access to energy for productive uses;
 - Support and promote equitable land and tenure arrangements that enable female producers to become decision-makers and owners;
 - Improve women’s productivity in using energy for agriculture and small business through training, market linkages, and access to information.
- ***Promote access to renewable energy***
 - Ensure that the overall national energy framework is gender-sensitive;
 - Earmark funds for Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math (STEM) education in school curricula for boys and girls.
- ***Develop capacity and encourage participation***
 - Introduce affirmative action for training women in technical and managerial careers in the energy sector;
 - Ensure that a minimum percentage of women participate in decision making from the ministerial down to village levels;

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- Allocate funds to the capacity development of women and girls;
 - Encourage both women and men to participate in businesses involved in energy access.

B. Regional/Local Governments

- Encourage gender mainstreaming in local government and community levels;
- Promote messaging of the benefits of renewable energy through women's groups, schools, and health clinics;
- Design and implement capacity building to consider the needs of women and men in the design of energy access programs;
- Remove internal gender biases and discrimination in public sector organizations;
- Encourage gender-sensitive budgets so that local governments can assess the economic value of policy commitments on gender equality.

C. Communities and Civil Society

- Lobby for better services targeted towards women and children;
- Assist in collecting information on men and women's roles, access, needs, priorities, and perspective on energy-related issues;
- Support equality for women in the decision-making process at a local level;
- Enable women and girls to acquire access to information, training, and resources related to energy access.

D. Donors and International Organizations

- Invest in local women energy entrepreneurs;
- Engage women leaders, especially the environment and energy scientists and ministers, to serve as role models in the effort to mainstream gender into the renewable energy sector at all levels;
- Support organizations that practice gender-inclusive and deliberately women supportive approach to energy access solutions;
- Compile and disseminate examples of good practices and develop norms and guidelines for gender mainstreaming;

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- Invest in the capacity building of the energy sector, with emphasis on empowering disadvantaged women and men;
 - Encourage the media, in both developed and developing countries, to provide more coverage on gender and energy issues;
 - Promote equal opportunities for men and women within the donor sector;
 - Provide capacity building support of gender focal staff;
 - Support the development and implementation of a gender-sensitive energy policy framework both on national and international levels.

E. Private Sector Organizations

- Engage women not only as users/consumers of energy products, but also as producers, suppliers, and after-sales service providers;
- Help make the business case for women's energy entrepreneurship to donors and policymakers;
- Promote more women into executive and decision-making roles.

Solar Sister as a Model of Supporting Women Energy Entrepreneurs

Noted are the multiple ways in which Solar Sister strengthens women's role in the energy transition:

1. Empowering women as leaders. As a women-led social enterprise, Solar Sister has affirmed high-level support for advancing gender equality on the road to ensuring universal energy access. Katherine Lucey, Founder and CEO of Solar Sister, was recognized as Schwab Social Entrepreneur at the World Economic Forum on Africa in Cape Town. Over 80% of Solar Sister's board is comprised of women leaders from the finance, technology and clean energy sectors. Besides promoting women's leadership internally, Solar Sister is a key global advocate for bridging the gender technology divide.



2. Empowering women through local workforce development. Solar Sister empowers women through local green jobs and workforce development across its growing operations in Uganda and Tanzania in East Africa, and Nigeria in West Africa. Over 86% of Solar Sister’s staff is comprised of women energy managers, trainers, business coaches and technicians. Scaling up these efforts to provide jobs and advancement opportunities for women in the clean tech sector is vital for meeting the SEforAll objectives. This need is very evident in the sustainable energy sector, and is an area in which Solar Sister is playing a vital role.

3. Empowering women as clean energy entrepreneurs. Solar Sister’s business model is focused on building a women-driven last-mile distribution network to bring energy access to underserved communities. Solar Sister recruits, trains, and mentors African women to build sustainable businesses selling portable solar lamps, mobile phone chargers, and clean cookstoves. Solar Sister entrepreneurs are equipped with business in a bag kit, business, and technology skills, and the confidence to succeed. Women use their social networks to provide the most effective distribution channel to rural and hard-to-reach customers. Sisterhood is an important aspect of Solar Sister’s mission. It means providing a safe space where women come together to share their challenges and successes by using technology to earn a living and meet local energy needs.

Since the women are firmly rooted in their communities, they become a trusted source of post-point of sale customer care. This sustained service is vital for building customer's confidence in clean energy technologies. As Hannah Owot, a Solar Sister Entrepreneur in Uganda says, "I do my work. I set my goals. I determine my success. I do not wait for anyone else to do it for me. I am a Solar Sister Entrepreneur. For me the sky is not the limit, it is only the beginning."

4. Empowering women as consumers. Solar Sister Entrepreneurs benefit firsthand as users of clean energy and use the power of personal testimony to educate their communities on the benefits of the solar and clean cooking solutions they sell. For example, Solar Sister Valentina Tiem in Tanzania is supporting better education for her grandchildren who are now able to study longer with their quality solar lights. Solar Sister Florence's customer Teddy in Uganda is a tailor who has been able to grow her business thanks to more productive hours with solar home solution. Solar Sister Iniobong Okon in Nigeria is a retired nurse who set up a maternity clinic. Iniobong sees solar and clean cooking technology as a way to improve health-care services for women in her community. These are just a few of the many stories of the transformational, positive impact that Solar Sister's clean energy access initiatives have had on health, education, local livelihoods and a better environment.

Background information – Round

Table Participants

- Federal Ministry of Power, Federal Ministry of Environment, Rural Electrification Agency, AFDB, UNEP, ENERGIA, Nasarawa Women and Children Empowerment Initiative, Clean Technology, Energy Commission of Nigeria, ACETAF, NoMAP, USAID Power Africa, Sosai Renewables, Ministry of Women Affairs, news agencies,
- Olasimbo Sojinrin, Solar Sister Nigeria Country Director
- Chioma Ome, Solar Sister, Manager Innovation Hub
- Silvia Sartori, Program Manager, Women's Economic Empowerment, ENERGIA
- Queen Aghomon (Assistant Country Manager ACETAF)
- Sharon Ikeazor, Minister of State for the Environment, Nigeria
- Dr. Priscilla Achakpa, Special Advisor for Minister of State for the Environment, Nigeria
- Anita Otubu, Head PMU, Nigeria Electrification Project
- Dr. Meseret T Zemedkun – Head of Energy Unit, UNEP
- Ify Malo (CEO, Clean Technology Hub),
- Engr Faruk Yusuf Yabo, (Ag Director Renewable and Rural Access, Federal Ministry of Power),
- Dr. Abdulwaheed Ahmed (Ag Director nergy Policy, Planning, and Analysis, Energy Commission of Nigeria),
- Queen Aghomon (Assistant Country Manager ACETAF)
- Dr. Ejiro Otive-Igbuzor – Gender and monitoring and evaluation expert
- Kathy Julik Heine – USAID Power Africa
- Habiba Ali – CEO Sosai Renewables
- Adedotun Eyinade – Program Manager NoMAP

Contributing Women Entrepreneurs:

- Ester Peter,
- Mary Dauda,
- Oluwakemi Ojewoye
- Dr. Ejiro Otive-Igbuzor, Partner SSE
- Mrs. Ibiene Okeleke, Energy Training Centre

