Integrating Women Enterprises in the renewable Energy

The Global Gender Gap Report 2016 reported that it would take 79 years for Africa to achieve gender equality. Perhaps the reason for this trajectory is because gender equality has not been integrated into some of the core economic sectors such as the energy sector—which is a critical driver of economic growth in any country.

Why inclusive Renewable Energy? Infrastructure development including energy has been viewed as gender-neutral, with benefits assumed to accrue automatically to women. This is not the case. Women and men have unique uses of, and benefits from energy—including in its construction, operation and management—in different ways. The energy industry remains one of the most gender imbalanced sectors. Women face significant inequalities in access to technology, assets, information, and decision making in relation to energy. Women are more likely to experience negative impacts and to be left out of educational and economic opportunities linked to energy projects given existing inequalities.

Yet women are not just energy users. Women are a key part of the value chain across the entire energy sector, from producing and distributing household energy to employment in the large-scale electrification workforce. Acknowledging the potential of women to formally participate in the sector as providers and decision-makers, instead of merely as users, results in increased opportunities for women and men to fully benefit from the energy sector’s economic and investment opportunities.

As IPPs integrating women’s empowerment and gender equality strategies, you have an opportunity to deliver better and more impactful development outcomes.

Efforts to address gender considerations in energy at the household and community levels are often targeted to women’s access to energy sources and clean cookstoves. Today we are not here to speak about clean cook stoves. That’s important but we want to move the conversation a notch higher. Our conversation today is about building women’s entrepreneurship in renewable energy markets.

- Integrating women into all levels of the energy value chain will lead to more effective and efficient clean energy initiatives, unleash greater return on investments and expand emission reduction opportunities.
- The private sector has the potential to offer many opportunities for women to formally participate in the sector.
- Creating and sustaining suitable environments for women is necessary. It allows for their engagement and access to knowledge, finance and resources, as well as provides them with role models, mentors and flexible working arrangements for increased impact.
- On the other hand, women’s enterprises need to be ready to integrate into the renewable energy value chain.
What are some challenges that need to be addressed?

Women’s representation is limited in energy policy and private sector management primarily because there are many fewer women than men in engineering. Technical training in science, technology, engineering, and math—is viewed as a marker for upward movement in the energy sector, into the leadership of energy companies and policy spheres alike. A major worldwide gap exists for women in STEM.

On the investment, side women generally have less access to finance energy-related businesses than men do. Some studies have shown that women-owned businesses generally face more impediments than men in accessing grid electricity and transportation costs are a major challenge for women especially in agribusinesses. Regarding policy, gender stereotypes often lead to women being excluded from discussions about infrastructure plans and policies, resulting in the gender-blind policies, financing and execution.

Entry Points for integrating women

- **Promoting direct and indirect employment opportunities for women**—and enhancing women’s participation in traditionally male-dominated labor and physical tasks (i.e. stone quarrying, ballast crashing). Eg. African Development Bank’s (AfDB) Menengai Geothermal Development Project plans to increase Kenya’s national power generation capacity by approximately 25% and will be operated by the private sector as an independent power producer (IPP) or through a public private partnership. The project undertook a comprehensive gender assessment and collected available sex-disaggregated data. It also designed inclusive and gender-sensitive stakeholder engagement processes and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Be intentional set targets!

- **Mini Projects in Communities**—Communities that host large-scale energy projects often do not benefit from the energy produced, as the energy is immediately fed to the national grid. In order to address this disparity, IPPs could install smaller projects/ smaller solar farms in rural communities to the communities who do not benefit from the energy produced, addressing the needs of the community to access electricity and increasing their understanding and appreciation of renewable technologies. Such partnerships can provide an avenue for women to become engaged in decisions that affect their lives.

- **Support to Women’s Entrepreneurship**—Entrepreneurs, Vendors, and Suppliers There is great potential in the economic opportunities and revenue streams provided by large-scale clean energy programs, including for entrepreneurs, vendors, and suppliers. But if governments and energy companies are going to change existing gender imbalances, they must be proactive to identify and support women-led businesses in procurement processes and other contracting decisions. Be intentional about it.
a. Pre-qualify women owned businesses. One way that renewable energy projects could incentivize women’s entrepreneurship is to consider gender certification of vendors, suppliers, and other partners in the procurement process for these services.

b. Support Women’s entrepreneurship programmes--- create awareness to women businesses on the opportunities for entrepreneurship that exist.

c. Collective investment schemes by women entrepreneurs

d. Data base of women on areas of expertise... transport, security, accommodation, materials, training services, ( women please invest in male led sectors etc etc

- **Corporate policies on gender equality** A company’s policies and practices in relation to gender equality—across the spectrum of how a company addresses social issues at project sites to how human resource policies impact female employees—can often determine how energy investments are managed. One marker is a company’s openness to corporate social responsibility. The prevailing wisdom in corporate environmental responsibility is that improving environmental performance leads to profit opportunities, green practices can attract environmentally focused finance, and companies have the opportunity to differentiate themselves from non-renewable competitors.

- **Training, Scholarships and internships** - IPPs could be intentional and set aside resources to finance young women to pursue renewable energy related higher education. An internship scheme for those already in higher education prepares a pipeline of young women. A major challenge in specialized areas such as those of renewable energy is the availability of skilled staff locally. To address this challenges, IPPs could sponsor a local vocational training centre that trains technicians. An example in Zambia is with a mining company that rehabilitated and equipped a local trades school in north west Zambia, and provides training to at least 30 students per year in areas relevant to the mining sector.

- **Strengthen Women’s Associations, collective investment schemes working in renewable energy**