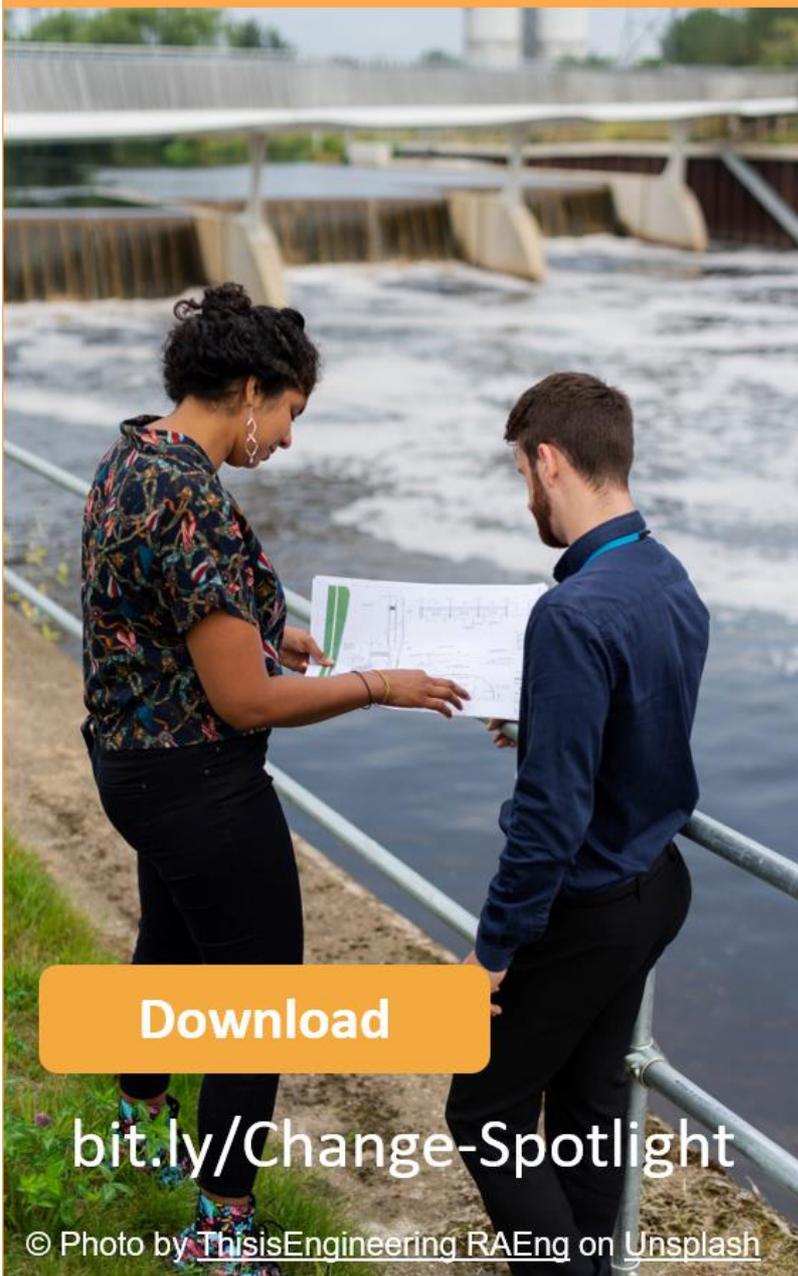


AEEP Energy Talks Spotlight



**Empowered
Actors of Change:**

**A Successful
African-European
Energy Transition
Depends on
Women**

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AEEP Energy Talks **Spotlight**

Empowered Actors of Change:

A Successful African-European Energy Transition Depends on Women

Key findings from the AEEP Energy Talks on 28 April 2021

SUMMARY

The energy sectors in Africa and Europe are experiencing a radical transition, moving from conventional energy sources to renewables and aiming to achieve access to energy for all by 2030. This change shall be designed as inclusive as possible to leave no one behind. It is a change that does not only allow to create a lot of opportunities to empower women, but whose success largely depends on women as drivers of this change. Promoting women enterprises in the renewable energy sector will be key to reaching remote areas and advancing electrification. Integrating women into the energy value chain can unlock benefits of long-term sustainability in the sector and contribute to overall economic growth. Supporting women as energy entrepreneurs, producers and consumers, however, calls for more dedicated finance as well as conducive, women-responsive education and workplace policies. This Spotlight looks at the various vital roles women play in the energy transition, as captured during the AEEP Energy Talks in April 2021. It describes the gaps that need closing but also celebrates successful initiatives and derives lessons learnt to promote women as “Empowered Actors of Change”.

Introduction

The fourth AEEP Energy Talks on 28 April 2021 was organised in collaboration with the Global Women’s Network for the Energy Transition (GWNET) and joined experts from Africa and Europe to discuss “Empowered Actors of Change: A Successful African-European Energy Transition Depends on Women”.

Moderated by **Ms Davina Ngei**, Communications Manager at GWNET, the discussion was opened by remarks from **Ms Amazouz Souhila**, Senior Policy Officer Department for Infrastructure and Energy African Union Commission (AUC) and **Mr Olgerts Viksne**, Programme Manager DG INTPA F1 European Commission (EC) on **why women in energy facilitate better societies**. Ms Souhila said that the energy field and business environment is not gender-sensitive enough and that this poses a major barrier to stimulate the growth of women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, cultural bias and stereotypes often prevent women from building expertise in science, technology and engineering fields, which are still seen male-exclusive. Therefore, Ms Souhila stressed, there is an urgent need to create awareness and engagement activities that break these stereotypes, and that work environments need to be made more attractive for women. This could be accomplished by ensuring that measures and policies are in place, which give equal opportunities for doing business and for accessing loans and incentives. She added that the AUC promotes gender equality on all levels, as highlighted in Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063, and that within infrastructure and energy, gender mainstreaming has become an integral part of the work through, for example, the establishment of [The African Network of Women in Infrastructure \(ANWIN\)](#) in 2019. Finally, Ms Souhila urged for the need to build coalitions and carry out networking, lobbying and advocacy activities through workshops, conferences, interviews and information sharing to make women’s voices heard.

Mr Viksne continued by emphasising that empowering women in the energy sector is a crucial component of the European Union’s work as stipulated in the EU Gender Action Plan and that women need to be supported at all levels in the energy transition. Firstly, providing access to modern energy for women is important for reducing poverty, promoting economic activities and enhancing income. Secondly, promoting women enterprises, especially in the renewable energy sector, will be key to reaching remote areas. Mr Viksne pointed out that women are vital in promoting electrification due their key position as last mile energy access distributors. Thirdly, integrating women into the energy value chain will unlock benefits of long-term sustainability in the sector and contribute to overall economic growth. For these goals to be accomplished, Mr Viksne underlined that access to finance, through blended financing, grants or guarantees, will be crucial for effectively promoting women energy entrepreneurship.

Next, **Ms Sheila Oparaocha**, International Coordinator and Program Manager of the [ENERGIA](#) International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy, shared her insights on **how to embed the role of women in energy for greater human well-being in Africa**. She remarked that there is a crucial need to re-frame the debate and narrative about best practices in women empowerment in the energy sector. Her insights for advancing women throughout the energy sector highlighted four aspects. There is a need to increase appropriate and adequate financing for women-led energy entrepreneurship. Similarly, it is important to increase women’s household, business and community energy access through technology, policy, and finance innovation and support. Ensuring adequate and appropriately located household and community lighting, and energy appliances for cooking and processing, energising water supply, and electrifying health and education facilities would also greatly enhance women’s’ opportunities. As would, recruiting, mentoring, and enacting women-responsive education and labour policies to ensure that women are in energy businesses, workplaces and in key decision-making positions throughout the energy sector.

The final presentation was delivered by [The Global Women's Network for the Energy Transition \(GWNET\)](#), who works to advance the global energy transition by empowering women in energy through interdisciplinary [networking](#), [advocacy](#), training, and [mentoring](#). **Ms Christine Lins**, Co-founder of GWNET and former Executive Secretary of REN21, **celebrated the progress and partnership of women in the African- European Energy Transition** in her presentation. Ms Lins said that GWNET seeks to address the current gender imbalances in the energy sector and to promote gender-sensitive action around the energy transition in all parts of the world. GWNET promotes various policies and solutions to increase women's participation in the sector. These include mainstreaming gender perspectives, creating networks and supportive mentorships, providing access to education and training, setting gender targets and quotas, supporting workplace policies and regulations and supporting a work-life balance. Additionally, Ms Lins concluded that GWNET recognises that national policy and programmes set the tone for gender equality and increased participation of women across a country.

Based on the webinar discussions, this AEEP Energy Talks Spotlight outlines the current state of women's participation in the energy sector and presents valuable lessons from regional gender programmes as well as individual, female-run entrepreneurs.

Women as Changemakers in the African-European Energy Transition

The energy sector in Africa and Europe is experiencing a radical transition, moving from conventional energy sources to renewables and aiming to achieve access to energy for all by 2030. This change shall be designed as inclusive as possible, leaving no one behind, and offers opportunities to empower women by creating inclusive societies.

According to the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, the energy transition ‘...is multidimensional, complex, non-linear, non-deterministic, and highly uncertain’. It offers the opportunity to radically reform the existing energy supply and energy systems and goes beyond replacing fossil with clean sources – it changes consumption, distribution and investment patterns; coalitions and capabilities of actors; and new socio-technical regimes of policy, regulation, mind-sets, beliefs, and social practices. In order to achieve ambitious targets of the energy transition, Ms Lins highlighted the following requirements:

1. Behaviour change, innovation (supply, delivery, usage) and integration across sectors.
2. Diverse backgrounds, capabilities, and perspectives.
3. A large diverse talent pool.

Gender in the Sustainable Energy Sector



Figure 1 Gender in the Sustainable energy Sector. Source: [GWNET Facts and Figures – GWNET \(globalwomennet.org\)](#)

Globally, women’s participation in the renewable energy sectors currently stands at 32 per cent, as depicted the Figure 1. This is higher than the fossil fuels industry, but far from the equal participation that we should be seeing. Ms Lins further reminded that gender equality is first and foremost a human right; everyone benefits from achieving gender equality. This is especially crucial in view of forecasts that predict the number of jobs in the renewable energy sector to rise from currently 11.5 million to 42 million by 2050, which means the industry will need the best talents of both women and men to sustain growth. Despite these global forecasts, estimates show that currently, in Africa, only one fifth of energy employees are women.

In Sub Sahara Africa, women are largely responsible for providing energy for cooking, processing food and crops, and water supply. 80% of the Sub-Saharan African population depends on biomass energy for meeting their cooking and heating needs, mostly using inefficient traditional means.¹ This

¹ IEA Energy Access Outlook 2017. Available at: [WEO-2017 Special Report: Energy Access Outlook – Analysis - IEA](#)

has direct impacts on health and mortality due to indoor air pollution, which mostly affects women and children.²

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted African women's role in wellbeing. Women represent a high share of employees in the health and care sector fighting the pandemic on the frontline where energy access is a prerequisite for quality services. Ms Oparaocha, however, also reminded that women, in addition to the formal work, do the bulk of unpaid care labour. This unpaid labour accounts for between 10% and 39% of GDP³. Gender parity could boost African economies by 10% by 2025. When women earn, they spend 90% of their incomes on their families, while men spend 30-40%⁴. Women's care roles, and their ability to earn incomes are, however, hampered by the low access to sustainable energy.

While women bear the brunt of lack of energy access, the webinar speakers also highlighted that women are transformative agents for improved sustainable energy access. As an example, Ms Oparaocha underlined that women dominate production of artisanal clean cookstoves and have been key as sales agents of pico solar products. The next section deals with similar practical experiences in more detail.

African Regional Gender Policies and Successful Female-Run Renewable Energy Businesses

Learning from experiences, existing policies and solutions is key for further supporting the ongoing progress for gender equality on SDG7 in Africa. Research shows that out of 132 National Energy Frameworks globally, 61 refer to gender and/or women. Of these 32 (52%) are from Africa. Regionally, sub-Saharan Africa substantially outperforms all other regions in terms of gender mainstreaming within energy sector policy development.⁵

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has developed the first ever regional policy framework that advances women's participation in the energy sector. This was adopted by ECOWAS's Heads of State in 2017 and is backed by a legal implementation framework.

During the webinar, **Mr Bah F M Saho**, Acting Executive Director of ECREE, shared his **experiences of implementing gender policies and key lessons for other regions**. He raised that, at present, the gender aspects of energy poverty limit opportunities for strengthening capacities of women and men to implement actions towards regional integration and socio-economic development in the ECOWAS region. He called for a continent-wide gender and energy intervention to accelerate responses to the gendered experience of energy poverty. He concluded that four areas of focus should be given priority:

1. Enhancing equal access to modern energy services in all Member States as a right, regardless of gender, age or socio-economic status.
2. Accelerating and harnessing different energy forms through inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development practices that promote equal gender mainstreaming in energy access, including domestic, community and productive use applications.

² [Access to clean cooking – SDG7: Data and Projections – Analysis - IEA](#)

³ Budlender, D. 2008. The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries. Gender and Development Programme Paper Number 4. This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries (unrisd.org)

⁴ Empowering Girls & Women, Clinton Global Initiative [clinton.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

⁵ Prebble, M. and Rojas, A., 2017. Energizing Equality: the importance of integrating gender equality principles in national energy policies and frameworks. Washington, USA: IUCN and USAID. Available at: [Energizing Equality: The importance of integrating gender equality principles in national energy policies and frameworks \(usaid.gov\)](#)

3. Harmonising legislation and practices across Member States with regards to gender equality and energy.
4. Increasing women's and men's equal participation and involvement in energy value chains, including markets, by fostering equal opportunity and support to scale up contributions to the local, national and regional economy.

The participation of women as entrepreneurs in the energy sector was finally illustrated by **Ms Sharon Yeti**, CEO and co-founder of Powerlive Zimbabwe, and her personal experiences. Ms Yeti pointed out that **Running a Successful Renewable Energy Business and Integrating Women as Changemakers** requires making this goal part of the company's vision. Furthermore, as an entrepreneur it is important to have a highly specific focus in terms of the market and the type of products you intend to sell. For example, someone can identify opportunities to improve access to renewable technology, whereas others focus on making existing solutions more cost-efficient. According to Ms Yeti, this is what helps increase competitiveness against well-established renewable energy providers. In the case of Powerlive Zimbabwe, Ms Yeti noted that finding the market was fairly easy, as 85% of the population in Zimbabwe does not have access to electricity and the majority of these affected are women and young people. Having a distribution model that ensures that customers can have access to the product at any given time also increases the company's chances of success. Powerlive has women sales agents in almost every district in Zimbabwe, which enables it to reach even the most remote customers at any given time. Powerlive's experiences show, it is easier for a woman to sell to another woman because they can relate on several challenges in terms of lack of access to energy. It is also often this interaction with a trusted trade person that triggers change.

Having herself benefitted from mentorship programmes and knowledge exchange, Ms Yeti underlined the importance of reaching out to established experts in the energy sector when setting up a new business. In her opinion, especially mentorship programmes, which many institutions are setting up for business development and business administration for solar energy companies, can create a framework and structure for guidance and support and increase the probability of success.

Key Lessons for Empowering Women in Energy

- Leverage the common gender frameworks already accepted by the AU and EU.
- Break stereotypes, re-frame the debate and narrative about best practices in women empowerment in the energy sector and build stronger networks. Support lobbying and advocacy activities through mentorships, workshops, conferences, interviews and information sharing to exchange knowledge and make women's voices heard.
- Access to finance, through blended financing, grants or guarantees, will be crucial in effectively promoting women energy entrepreneurship.
- Harmonising legislation and practices across African Union Member States with regards to gender equality and energy will align efforts and improve outcomes.
- Women are needed at the top as well as grassroots of the energy system. As forecasts predict the number of jobs in the renewable energy sector to rise to 42 million by 2050, the industry will need the best talents of both women and men to sustain growth.

About

The Africa-EU Energy Partnership (AEEP) is Africa and Europe's gateway for joint action on a green energy future. With an unmatched overview of the political processes and initiatives across both continents, the AEEP maps, monitors and convenes the actions and stakeholders that drive the African and European energy transformation. Providing a forum for political dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer connections, it enables Africa and Europe to make progress on their path to a sustainable energy future.

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