

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Efforts and Benefits of Mainstreaming Gender in the SADC Renewable Energy Sector



Introduction and Effective Practices

“Gender mainstreaming is much more than a women’s issue; it is the basis for establishing a level of equality between women and men that can help to stimulate economic growth, create higher level jobs, support communities, raise productivity and reduce poverty.” (UNIDO, 2014)

Mainstreaming gender in the energy sector means creating space for equal opportunities for women and men to reach full potential and contribute meaningfully towards sustainable development. A focus on increasing participation by women should be a top priority for reforming the energy sector. Increasing the number of women in decision-making positions can increase gender sensitivity in finding solutions to problems affecting the energy sector.

ENERGY PLAYS a pivotal role in the development agenda of southern Africa. Access to affordable, reliable and modern energy is critical in advancing the industrialization agenda and addressing development challenges such as poverty, gender inequalities and food insecurity.

Access to energy can be seen as a liberating factor for women, a key enabling factor to allow women and men to participate in economic development. Most women and girls in southern Africa spend their time on basic tasks that are time-consuming, non-remunerative and highly laborious, such as collecting biomass fuels, without access to modern energy services.

This further exacerbates gender inequalities as many women, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, are unable to access wage employment, education or business opportunities due to these responsibilities, and this also limits options for social and political interaction outside the household.

In most Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), women and girls are largely responsible for household and community activities including energy provision, and thus are the primary energy producers as well as the end users at household level. The limited participation of women in designing home energy systems, resource access, and decision-making at national and regional levels is a major challenge within the gender and energy nexus.

Energy production, procurement, transportation and distribution further

perpetuate gender imbalances. The primary source of energy for rural communities is fuel wood which may be sourced more than five kilometres away from homesteads. This has a negative impact on women, not only in travelling long distances on foot but women normally carry heavy loads of firewood on their heads, which can compromise physical health and wellbeing. In some situations where collecting firewood is restricted through formal regulations, women are vulnerable to harassment or fines for illegal firewood collection.

The SADC region has vast energy potential from solar, wind, nuclear, hydro, thermal, gas and petroleum sources. However, biomass is by far the major source of energy. Traditional biomass such as wood and charcoal account for more than 45 percent of final energy consumption in the region and if modern biomass, such as bagasse for boilers in the sugar industry, is included, the overall biomass share reaches more than 57 percent (REN21, 2015).

The absence of basic labour-saving devices and clean technologies such as fuel-efficient stoves burdens women in poorer households and prevents them from doing other productive activities. Although cheap and affordable, the use of biomass for cooking also has serious health implications.

Most of the population of the SADC region is affected by household air pollution from indoor smoke, according to the World Health Organization, and the majority of

those affected are women. Household Air Pollution (HAP) includes principally carbon monoxide and particulate matter, which are products of incomplete combustion and are hazardous to health, resulting in the death of more than 150,000 people each year. Almost half of the casualties are children. (REN21, 2015).

Impact of Cooking With Solid Fuels on Household Air Pollution in SADC, 2012

	Share of Population using Solid Fuels for Cooking (%)	Number of People Affected by HAP	Number of Deaths per Year from HAP
Angola	56	11 659 494	7 804
Botswana	37	741 447	311
DRC*	93	61 105 736	53 202
Lesotho*	62	1 271 958	1 869
Madagascar*	98	21 848 036	16 375
Malawi	97	15 429 289	13 250
Mozambique	96	24 195 259	12 858
Namibia	55	1 242 666	1 056
South Africa	13	6 654 610	7 623
Swaziland*	62	763 211	714
Tanzania	96	45 871 783	20 353
Zambia	83	11 682 332	8 629
Zimbabwe	70	9 607 022	9 158
SADC		212 072 843	153 229

Data from Mauritius and Seychelles not included.
* figures estimated by World Health Organization

REN21, 2015

ities. The use of clean energy gives women, men and children a lifeline from potentially hazardous conditions associated with traditional forms of biomass.

Considerable evidence has shown that mainstreaming gender in the renewable energy sector improves the effectiveness of results, drawing on a broader pool of participants, with more benefits for women as well as men.

Improved Livelihoods

For mainstreaming gender in the renewable energy sector, women's needs can be classified as practical (ensuring daily survival), productive (income generation), and strategic (changing position in society to gain greater equality with men, towards empowerment).

The practical aspect involves, for example, household lighting, improved cooking stoves and other technologies. The productive aspect enhances income generation, for example through improved technologies such as food-drying installations and electric sewing-machines, and increased skills and knowledge such as marketing strategies for improved cook stoves. Street lighting is strategic in that it allows women greater freedom of movement after dark. Some examples and results of different energy forms are shown in the table.

Renewable Energy Meeting the Needs of Women

Energy Form	Issues		
	Practical	Productive	Strategic
Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pumping of water supplies powering mills for grinding lighting to improve working conditions at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase activities during evening hours refrigeration for food production and sale power for enterprises such as hair salons and internet cafes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> make streets safer to allow participation in activities such as meetings and evening classes opening horizons through radio, TV and internet
Improved Biomass (supply and conversion technology)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> protection of health through use of better stoves less time and effort spent on gathering firewood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more time for productive activities lower cost of heat for income-generating activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> control of natural forests in community forestry management frameworks
Mechanical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> milling and grinding transport of water and crops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increases the variety of enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> transport facilitates opportunities for social, commercial and political interaction

Clancy, 2000

Social Services Delivery

Mainstreaming gender in the renewable energy sector contributes to social services delivery, for health and education. Access to electricity reduces the rate of maternal mortality through the provision of electricity or other forms of modern renewable energy in clinics and hospitals, especially in rural areas. This reduces the risk of maternal and infant mortality, through more lighting in rooms during delivery and the use of advanced equipment and technologies. Access to renewable energies contributes to better educational facilities where boys and girls will have access to lighting for studies. More girls will be allowed to attend school if they do not have to perform essentials of collecting wood and water.

Benefits of Access to Renewable Energy

Mainstreaming gender in renewable energy has a number of benefits that improve the livelihoods of both women and men. Access to modern energy services frees the time of women and girls to concentrate on other economic and social pursuits such as investing in entrepreneurial and educational activ-

Modern Energy Services

Renewable energy can play an important role in increasing access to modern energy services, which frees woman's time from domestic tasks, permits home study and reading, enables access to educational media and communications in schools and at home, mitigates the impacts of indoor air pollution on women,

allows access to better medical facilities for maternal care, and permits income-generating activities. By taking a gender approach, renewable energy suppliers can increase their potential client base and the sustainability in use of their technologies.

Barriers in Access to Renewable Energy

The role of women in the renewable energy sector is undefined, with the usual portrayal as passive end-users only. Women play a critical role in energy provision and consumption within households and possess valuable knowledge relevant to sustainable energy solutions. Due to cultural stereotypes women are excluded from participation in energy markets and also disqualified from relevant pro-poor, public private partnerships.

Women in most cases do not have the same access as men to the decision-making for adoption of clean energy technology, and women in rural areas have less access to this process than urban women. The lack of attention to women-centred approaches in the energy sector in the region can be explained in part by a lack of awareness of the need for gender mainstreaming — due to the absence of gender disaggregated data, little awareness of the benefits to be gained from incorporating gender analysis into energy project design, and a lack of capacity for gender mainstreaming in the energy sector (Clancy, 2000).

Women in rural and peri-urban areas are generally not aware of Renewable Energy Technologies (RETs) and do not have information on suppliers and resource availability. RETs remain a costly source of energy for communities as the intended beneficiaries are in the low-income bracket. Most women in southern Africa, especially in rural areas, cannot afford the upfront costs for solar home systems, lanterns and improved cook stoves in the absence of smart subsidies, or low interest loans and loan guarantees.

Women are affected by the lack of green policies targeted at improving the informal sector yet the informal sector accounts for a large portion of the Gross Domestic Product in many SADC Member States. The informal sector is energy intensive, and is highly populated by women (Mabebe-Wright, 2014). Women are often excluded from skills and clean energy technology programs and projects that have the potential to improve their lives. Other challenges include inadequate use of effective legislative and regulatory frameworks that would support market development.

The regional trend at the critical decision-making level in the energy sector is more inclined towards men, with women occupying less than 10 percent of most governance structures in this regard. This imbalance in the decision-making structures of the energy sector could hamper women's access to renewable energy unless clear policy frameworks are agreed and implemented.

Gender Composition of Energy Sector Governance

	Men	Women	Total
Ministers responsible for energy	13	2	15
Heads of power utilities	15	0	15
Heads of regulatory institutions in SADC	10	2	12a
Heads of regional power organizations (SAPPb and RERAc)	2	0	2

^a Of the 15 SADC Member States, Angola, Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania are without energy/electricity regulators.

^b The Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) was established in 1995 to coordinate the planning, generation, transmission and marketing of electricity on behalf of the 12 interconnected SADC Member State utilities.

^c The Regional Electricity Regulators Association of Southern Africa (RERA) was established in 2002 to facilitate the harmonization of regulatory policies, legislation, standards and practices and to be a platform for effective cooperation among energy regulators within the SADC region. 10 of the 12 countries with energy/electricity regulators are members of RERA.

SADC, SARDC, 2016. *Mainstreaming Gender in the SADC Energy Sector*, Energy in Southern Africa policy brief no. 12

Effective Practices

The 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with a mandate of promoting economic integration in all fields of activity of the constituting countries of West Africa, has developed a forward-looking policy that prioritizes gender and women-centred approaches in all facets of energy and renewable energy development in the region. ECOWAS considers that the challenges of gender inequality in the energy sector originate almost entirely from the lack of gender considerations in the planning process. ECOWAS therefore seeks to recognize the main challenges and constraints for gender equality in energy access at three levels:

- ❖ the political level
- ❖ the level of the energy supplier, be it a public-purpose or private market actor, and
- ❖ the level of the energy consumer.

A result of this strategy was the launch of the ECOWAS Program on Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access (ECOW-GEN) developed by ECREEE as a standalone ECOWAS program with a specialised focus on complementing regional efforts to improve sustainable energy for all.

To institutionalize the interventions being implemented through ECOW-GEN, ECREEE teamed up with the ECOWAS Department of Social Affairs and Gender and formulated a policy that commits the Member States to take concrete actions toward the elimination of all forms of inequality in energy production and consumption in the ECOWAS region.

The overall vision of the ECOWAS Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access is a world where men and women enjoy equal access to modern energy services that is easily available, affordable and contributes to high standards of living and economic development.

This is the first regional policy instrument that aims to close gender gaps in the energy sector; to create awareness and understanding of policymakers about gender-sensitive policies; to expand business opportunities; and to encourage information, education and communication among the Member States about gender and energy. The policy brings in the interests of all of the Member States including their long-term development goals, and presents concrete targets and timelines for implementation.

Conclusion

The inability to consider gendered interests and the different needs of men and women can limit the effectiveness of energy programs and policies, as well as other development activities that involve energy use. Poverty eradication, increased food production, better health and education, more economic opportunities, a safer environment, and empowerment of women are critical factors that can be addressed through mainstreaming gender in renewable energy initiatives. A nexus of gender, poverty and energy has been established. Access to modern, sustainable energy services can significantly reduce gender-based time and labour burdens as well as improve the health conditions and opportunities for enterprise and capacity-building in communities.

Establishment of Energy Gender Desks and Gender Focal Points

The new SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (SACREEE) is encouraged to promote the establishment of Gender/Energy Units or Desks in the relevant ministries of the Member States. The utility of these entities as coordinated by gender focal points appointed on relevant expertise is that they create advocacy programs for general awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming in energy access. Providing the critical link between policy makers and communities, they can

- ❖ generate gender responsive indicators for the energy sector;

- ❖ repackage information to enhance availability by various stakeholders; and,
- ❖ generate gender-responsive statistics.

The presence of gender desks will significantly close the gap between the gender mainstreaming declarations and the policies of the Energy Protocol, the RISDP, the RIDMP and their strategy delivery value because of the follow-up action by gender focal persons through interpretation and practical implementation of programs and projects.

Communication Strategy

As the SACREE initiated Gender Action Plan on renewable energy is developed, it is also important that a communication strategy is established at the start of project cycles and used throughout all phases. The strategy will be useful to mobilise Member States and stakeholders through knowledge exchange to appreciate the processes, and the desired and expected outcomes, of integrating the strategy in national level interventions and how these national efforts will ultimately contribute to the objectives of regional integration and cooperation.

Participation in Markets for Renewable Energy

The liberalisation of energy markets is opening up new opportunities for the provision of energy services. Renewable Energy Service Companies are springing up, many focusing on rural areas, offering the potential of good incomes. SADC Member States should ensure that women are not excluded from these opportunities. Gender focal persons from Member States can work with the regional apex bodies to overcome the notion that women are not interested in technical matters. Women need to be empowered with knowledge, confidence and physical resources to make the contributions effective. A holistic approach is needed for sharing technical and entrepreneurial skills and opportunities.

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