



Jecinta, energy entrepreneur, demonstrates a solar lantern  
Photo: Practical Action

## Practical ACTION

# MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY AND PLANS

## SUMMARY

Over the last three decades, the value of gender mainstreaming in policy, planning, and implementation has been increasingly recognized as a key strategy for accelerating progress towards gender equality. In Kenya, since the mid-2000s, government, civil society, international donors, and gender champions have collaborated to mainstream gender in the energy sector. A key milestone in this process was the 2019 launch of Kenya's 'Gender Policy in Energy'. This policy brief summarizes some of the key steps along the way and synthesizes some useful lessons for other countries interested in the 'how' of gender mainstreaming in energy policy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Learning from Kenya's journey and success

- Use gender analysis or audits to identify policy gaps, needs, priorities, and existing strengths. Ensure the active participation of women and men involved in the energy sector in this process, including household users and last-mile distributors.
- Build multi-stakeholder alliances: include civil society, the private sector, and government. Don't attempt to go it alone. Influence and leverage multilateral agreements that include gender mainstreaming commitments.
- Identify, cultivate, and support gender champions within key institutions of government. Capacity-building and technical support on how to do gender mainstreaming is key.
- Sensitize decision-makers and use evidence to demonstrate the value of gender mainstreaming. Cultivating political goodwill is critical.
- Support implementation: policies on paper are not enough. Gender mainstreaming is a long-term process, not a one-off event.

## HOW ENERGY CONTRIBUTES TO NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS

Access to energy is widely recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving multiple national and

international development goals. For example, access to energy is critical for good quality healthcare and education, as well as economic activities across agriculture, industry, and services. It is also fundamental for household cooking, heating, and lighting. For these reasons, in 2015, the UN agreed Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7, which calls on member states to ‘ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all’. As the climate crisis accelerates, this goal is even more urgent as energy has an important role in both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Despite this recognition and widespread progress in recent years, in 2020 over 700 million people lacked access to reliable electricity and 2.4 billion relied on inefficient and polluting cooking systems.<sup>1</sup> Widespread and deep-rooted gender inequalities mean that these impacts fall disproportionately on women and girls. Therefore, increasing energy access is critical to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and, likewise, gender equality and women’s empowerment are critical to increasing energy access.

## WHY IS GENDER IMPORTANT TO ENERGY POLICY, PLANNING, AND IMPLEMENTATION?

Globally, women are key energy users, yet they remain underrepresented in energy markets, decision-making processes, and policy. Their role in household cooking and the prevalence of unclean cooking systems means that they are disproportionately impacted by indoor air pollution.<sup>2</sup> Collecting biomass for cooking and heating also falls mostly to women and girls, and this is getting harder as the accessibility of energy resources declines, driven by population growth, urbanization, environmental degradation, and climate change. Consequently, women and girls are spending more time searching for resources, and less time studying, earning incomes, and fulfilling other goals. They are also increasingly exposed to risks of violence, injury, and exhaustion.

Many income-earning activities where women are overrepresented are heat-intensive, such as food processing. At the same time, women are highly effective distributors of modern decentralized and sustainable energy products.<sup>3</sup> Despite this evidence, women are excluded from energy-sector decision-making processes and policy. This underrepresentation and a lack of gender-disaggregated data hamper the development of an effective and inclusive enabling environment. Unless women participate in decision-making, and their specific needs, priorities, and opportunities are

understood in energy policy, planning, and implementation, the energy sector will continue to reinforce and exacerbate gender inequalities.

### What is gender mainstreaming?

As per the UN Economic and Social Council, and cited by UN Women:

*Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.<sup>4</sup>*

## HOW DID KENYA SUCCESSFULLY MAINSTREAM GENDER INTO NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY?

### Introduction

In 2019, Kenya’s Ministry of Energy launched its Gender Policy. This was a key milestone in a long collaborative journey of gender mainstreaming, accompanied by ENERGIA International, Practical Action, and partners, which extends back to the mid-2000s. The journey offers valuable lessons to other countries interested in learning about the ‘how’ of gender mainstreaming.



Carolynne making fuel briquettes which she sells alongside improved cookstoves.  
Photo: Practical Action

Women, men, youth and PWDs [people with disabilities] have different levels of access to various energy resources. Policy interventions have impacted them differently. This policy is premised on identified gaps and focuses on enhancing inclusivity in access to energy services, promote participation by both genders, sharing of accrued benefits and creation of gender responsive work environments in the energy sector.

Ministry of Energy, Government of Kenya, Gender Policy, 2019.

### Identify gaps and priorities

In 2006 – supported by the European Union – ENERGIA International, Practical Action, the East African Energy Technology Development Network, and the University of Nairobi collaborated with the Kenyan Ministry of Energy to conduct a gender audit of Kenya's energy policies and programmes. The gender audit aimed to:

- identify gender gaps and formulate strategies to address these gaps in national energy-related policies; and
- make energy and gender issues visible to a wide audience through networking and advocacy, and influence energy policies and programmes.<sup>5</sup>

The audit methodology included document reviews, participatory workshops, interviews, and focus-group discussions with all energy-sector stakeholders. Findings were wide-reaching, emphasizing gender-blind policies, gaps in organizational management, a lack of dedicated resources, and insufficient sex-disaggregated data. They also highlighted broader socioeconomic issues such as gendered inequalities in land tenure, health outcomes, and economic activities. A key finding was that current energy policy was likely to increase energy poverty amongst women if it continued to strictly adhere to least-cost criteria and ignore socio-cultural dynamics.<sup>6</sup>

### Build coalitions and leverage international movements

Despite the continued commitment of Ministry of Energy staff, recommendations were not immediately adopted. However, the experience catalysed a nascent coalition of Kenyan Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and international

NGOs. Around the same time, the then UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, convened international actors under the 'Sustainable Energy for All' (SEforAll) initiative, which was launched in 2011. Kenya was one of the first signatories in 2012. Utilizing an evidence base developed by Practical Action, including the annual 'Poor People's Energy Outlook' (PPEO) publication, civil society contributed to the SEforAll agenda to ensure that gender was mainstreamed. Collaboration between the Ministry of Energy and civil society also revitalized interest in the findings of the gender audit conducted back in 2006.

### Identify, cultivate, and support champions

With revitalized interest in gender and energy, Ministry of Energy staff, who had co-led the original gender audit, quickly took up the reins, supporting the preparation of Kenya's SEforAll Action Agenda and Investment Prospectus (2015) and ensuring the consideration of gender throughout.<sup>7</sup> They worked closely with the SEforAll technical team (composed of CSOs and businesses) which convened stakeholders and used validation workshops to review and improve text. CSOs in Kenya disseminated the final action agenda via media, and sensitized civil society, industry, and government in other counties on the nexus between gender, energy, and development. In 2016, the Kenyan government was invited to present at the SEforAll Africa conference on mainstreaming gender. In the same year, the government also appointed a Gender Focal Point at the Ministry of Energy who injected new dynamism into the process.

### Build the evidence base

Over this period, ENERGIA, Practical Action, and partners implemented programmes across Kenya and other countries that developed and promoted decentralized sustainable energy solutions. Gender was mainstreamed throughout: programmes included a strong focus on clean cooking solutions, economic empowerment of women energy entrepreneurs, and support for local micro-, small-, and medium-sized energy businesses. Practical Action also participated in consortiums with the Kenyan Ministry of Energy, often with a specific focus around gender and inclusion. Through this work, Practical Action was able to build the evidence base and sensitize key decision-makers



An energy entrepreneur sets up her store.  
Photo: Practical Action

on what gender mainstreaming in energy looks like in practice and how it supports and consolidates gains under other development priorities, such as health, education, employment, and economic development.

### Develop a national gender policy

In November 2019, the Kenyan Ministry of Energy published its Gender Policy. In the preface, the Principal Secretary explained that the policy is:

*...intended to strengthen institutional capacities for gender mainstreaming as a basis for gender sensitive project formulation, implementation, and impact evaluation of all energy projects in Kenya...<sup>8</sup>*

The contribution of civil society is acknowledged, the policy provides an overview of relevant legislation and existing policies, describes gender challenges in energy, offers a situational analysis of progress towards gender equality in the energy sector, identifies gaps in existing programmes, and provides a monitoring framework. In 2021, the Ministry of Energy was awarded the First Lady's Trailblazer award in recognition of its role as a pioneer of gender mainstreaming in government.

### Support implementation for sustainability

The publication of the Gender Policy was a significant milestone, but alone it is just a document. Civil society, the private sector, and government are collaborating to support its implementation. In 2021,

an Energy Sector Gender Committee was formed with representatives from semi-autonomous government agencies (SAGAs) in energy,<sup>9</sup> civil society, and Kenya's Council of Governors. The committee is mandated to oversee and steer policy implementation via a set of thematic working groups. Practical Action and its partners have provided support to

the committee, and to date seven SAGAs are at different stages of revising existing policies to align with the national Gender Policy and develop accompanying action plans. ENERGIA International, Practical Action, and partners have also invited and supported women energy entrepreneurs to policy forums to explain their work and priorities.



Solar lanterns for sale.  
Photo: Practical Action

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO ENERGY POLICY, PLANS, AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION MAKE?

The journey from Kenya's 2006 gender audit to the development of a national Gender Policy in Energy in 2019 has been a long one. In the years since the policy was launched, partners have continued to collaborate on its dissemination and the sensitization of county governments, semi-autonomous government agencies, and the energy industry. The process has:

- increased awareness and understanding of the nexus between energy, gender, and wider development priorities;
- strengthened partnerships across the sector; and
- generated a shift in political will and, ultimately, a new policy.

However, overall, it is still too early to see a groundswell of change at the community level. Nonetheless, the incorporation of gender considerations into energy plans by county governments and industry, and key decision-makers' improved understanding and commitment to engendering energy provision, are themselves important – though not sufficient – steps on the journey towards gender equality. Further collaboration between the government, industry, and development partners is needed to ensure the gains made so far translate into gendered impacts at the community level.

### Notes

- 1 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2022) 'SDG 7: overview' <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal7>> [accessed October 2022].
- 2 World Health Organization (2022) 'Household air pollution' <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health>> [accessed October 2022].
- 3 Global Distributors Collective (2022) 'Gender in business: lessons learned for last mile distributors', <<https://globaldistributorscollective.org/gender-in-business-lessons-learned-for-last-mile-distributors>> [accessed October 2022].
- 4 UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (1997) 'Gender mainstreaming: extract from Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997, chapter IV' <<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF>> [accessed October 2022].
- 5 Practical Action and ENERGIA International (2007) 'How gender audits can improve Kenya's policy impacts' <<https://practicalaction.org/knowledge-centre/resources/how-gender-audits-can-improve-kenyas-policy-impacts/>> [accessed October 2022].
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Available here <<https://www.se4all-africa.org/seforall-in-africa/country-actions/action-agenda/>> and here <<https://www.se4all-africa.org/seforall-in-africa/country-actions/investment-prospectus/>> [accessed January 2023].
- 8 Ministry of Energy, Government of Kenya (2019) 'Gender policy in energy' <<https://energy.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Gender-Policy-in-Energy.pdf>> [accessed January 2023].
- 9 These include the Kenya Power and Lighting Company, the Kenya Electricity Generating Company, the Rural Electrification Authority, the Geothermal Development Company, the Nuclear Electricity Board, the Renewable Energy Directorate, and others.



### About Practical Action

We are an international development organization putting ingenious ideas to work so people in poverty can change their world. Our vision is for a world that works better for everyone.

We help people find solutions to some of the world's toughest problems, including challenges made worse by catastrophic climate change and persistent gender inequality.

We believe in the power of small to change the big picture. And that together we can take practical action to build futures free from poverty.

**Big change starts small.**