



Field of Intervention: Gender Mainstreaming in the Energy Sector

Implementing Gender-Responsive Measures for a Prosperous and Inclusive Energy Industry

Background

Despite growing momentum for transformation, South Africa's energy sector remains deeply gender skewed. Women are still largely absent from decision-making tables, technical teams, and policy forums, making up just **7%** of engineers and holding **less than 30%** of roles in the renewable energy space. These disparities are shaped by several barriers, including limited access to STEM education, institutional bias, and a lack of mentorship and support networks.

The effects ripple far beyond the boardroom. Nearly **38% of South African households are led by women**, and they are disproportionately affected by energy poverty. In **rural areas**, **57%** of those without electricity are women, who often shoulder the burden of collecting unclean fuels, a daily reality that compounds time poverty, health risks, and economic exclusion.

While this energy gap reinforces gender disparities, it also represents a powerful opportunity. Research shows that reducing gender disparities in employment and pay by just **10%** could boost GDP by **3.2%** and cut unemployment by nearly **3%**. These figures reflect not only economic growth but also the unleveraged potential of women's participation in the energy sector. Gender equality isn't just a social imperative; it's smart economics and essential to building a resilient, inclusive energy future.

Women hold under



30%

of energy roles

Challenges



- **Wage gaps and unemployment:** On average, women earn 30% less than men and face higher unemployment, 36.8% compared to 32.4% for men, highlighting persistent economic inequality.
- **STEM exclusion:** Just 28.5% of girls pursue STEM-related studies in higher education, narrowing their path to technical careers in energy.



- **Limited access and representation:** Women hold only 22% of senior roles in the renewables sector, and a mere 8.1% of Eskom's procurement benefits Black women-owned suppliers.
- **Cultural and care burdens:** Deep-rooted gender norms and unpaid caregiving responsibilities continue to restrict women's ability to access leadership, training, and professional growth opportunities.



Opportunities for Impact

- **Diversity drives results:** Companies with 30% or more women in leadership consistently outperform those without, proving that gender diversity isn't just fair, it's smart business.
- **The Just Energy Transition is a game-changer:** South Africa's shift to cleaner energy opens the door to redesign access, reskill the workforce, and empower women entrepreneurs across the energy value chain.
- **A policy environment ready for change:** Groundbreaking frameworks like the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Policy and the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) embed gender equality into national energy planning; now it's time to put them into action.

South African–German Energy Programme (SAGEN) Supported Activities

- **Women in Energy Leadership Programme:** Designed to boost technical expertise and leadership confidence among women in management and engineering roles.
 - Only **15 professional mentees** selected
 - Jointly implemented by **DEE Gender Unit, GIZ (SAGEN-CET), and AWEaP.**
- **Capacity Building on Strategic leadership,** corporate governance, financial acumen, negotiation, and policy engagement.
- **Mentorship & Networking:** Executive coaching, cross-sector mentorship, and networking with senior leaders.
- Study Tour to Germany for Exposure to European best practices.



Municipal Integration

- **City of Cape Town Partnership:** Embedding gender-responsive approaches into municipal utility policies and practices to create a more inclusive work environment.
- **Workplace Equity Reforms:** Supporting City of Cape Town (CoCT) in applying gender equity principles to HR systems, recruitment, and leadership development.



Institutional Mainstreaming

- **National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA) Collaboration:** Strengthening internal capacity with gender-focused training, policy guidance, and a dedicated gender committee to drive institutional change.
- **Department of Electricity and Energy (DEE) Alignment:** In close partnership with the DEE, SAGEN supports the implementation of the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Policy by fostering mentorship, inclusive planning processes, and the sustainable integration of gender-responsive practices across the energy sector.



Entrepreneurship & Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) Inclusion

- **Support for Women-Owned Enterprises:** In partnership with DEE, UN Women, and the Netherlands Embassy, **SAGEN** promotes access to finance, procurement opportunities, and capacity-building for women-led SMMEs in the energy sector.



Early Results and Lessons

- **Shifting mindsets:** Gender-sensitive training at NERSA and the City of Cape Town is raising awareness and setting the stage for long-term cultural transformation within institutions.
- **Building the pipeline:** The Women in Energy programmes are successfully growing a new generation of female leaders, increasing visibility and confidence across the sector.
- **Strengthening alliances:** Cross-sector collaboration is gaining momentum, with strong institutional partnerships forming around a shared vision for a more inclusive and equitable energy future.
- **Three public organisations** in the electricity sector have begun implementing at least one gender-responsive measure each; this target is on track.
- **Five implementation-ready proposals** are being developed to support inclusive reform, which are also on track for delivery by 2026.

Conclusion

Achieving a Just Energy Transition means transforming not only how South Africa generates power, but also who gets to lead, participate in, and benefit from that transformation. Gender mainstreaming is not a side issue; it is central to improving policy effectiveness and building a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive energy future. Early progress shows that change is possible when institutions commit to equity, build inclusive leadership pipelines, and break down structural barriers. With continued support, collaboration, and bold action, South Africa's energy sector can become a model for gender-responsive development, where opportunity, innovation, and impact are shared by all.

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