



Empowering Women in Clean Energy:

Advancing and Retaining an Equitable
Workforce

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About the Report

This report was funded by The Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, as part of the “Women for Green Jobs” (W4GJ) program implemented by Shortlist with support from Value for Women. The goal of W4GJ is to ensure that more women are accessing and succeeding in clean energy careers in Africa, specifically targeting job placements, career support, and employer-level interventions across seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda. W4GJ also addresses wider sectoral challenges by creating a public good talent pool of thousands of pre-vetted and screened women to fill climate jobs of the future, engaging them in training initiatives and apprenticeship programs, and gaining on-the-job experience. Additional dedicated support is provided by Value for Women to employers to implement more gender-inclusive workplace policies and practices through a dedicated learning community, tailored assessments and recommendations, and deep-dive technical assistance. This program will work with at least forty clean energy companies to support their growth by addressing their hiring challenges.

This report is a follow-up to our report, [“Bottlenecks and Breakthroughs: Advancing Gender Equity in African Clean Energy”](#), where we found that, despite the clean energy sector hiring more women, they still face unique barriers and bottlenecks to accessing jobs. This report builds off our previous report and articulated framework, focusing on how to support women once they have entered into the sector by better understanding what challenges and opportunities exist for them related to their advancement and retention. Such focus is important to ensure that women are supported through their employment lifecycle, as well as given the opportunities they need to grow within clean energy jobs.

About Shortlist

Shortlist is a talent advisory firm that provides recruitment services and technology for both leadership hiring and large-scale “impact talent” programs across African startups, social ventures, and mission-driven organizations through Shortlist Futures and Shortlist Search. Shortlist Futures is a workforce innovation lab working to address twin challenges – driving economic growth and employment opportunities. We work across Africa’s emerging impact sectors and companies to solve their human capital challenges. Our programs have worked with 1,000+ impact-led organizations, engaged 2M+ job candidates, created 6k+ jobs, and are on track to generate more than \$200M+ in income.

We have worked with 1,000+ employers in Africa, and have designed and executed large-scale workforce development programs, co-created with the UK’s FCDO, the Netherlands’ Challenge Fund for Youth Employment, Mastercard Foundation, and the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP), to build a future-proof workforce for the global digital economy and provide career on-ramps to young people across 26 African countries (with over 50% of placements being women).

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles in the renewable energy sector, establishing businesses as energy producers, distributors and service providers. Women are also taking on an increasing number of roles at the entry level in clean energy companies across Africa – in fact, more women make up roles in renewable energy than the traditional energy sector. Companies are also paying more attention to gender in their policies and operations. Over the last five years, companies have adopted more inclusive practices such as flexible working hours, implementing more stringent safety measures and hiring women into traditionally male-dominated roles.

Shortlist has sought to accelerate this trend, implementing a range of gender-lensed talent programs over the last six years, resulting in 66% female representation, well above the current industry benchmark of 32% female employees¹. Under Shortlist's "Women For Green Jobs" program, funded by The Global Energy Alliance for People & Planet (GEAPP), we are supporting more than 750 women transitioning into clean energy careers, and working with Value For Women and other partners to promote gender equity in clean energy workspaces and success on the job. Through this work we will give young women critical first-hand work experience, offer job search support, and train hundreds of women with the technical skill needed to take on roles in finance, operations and maintenance, and engineering.

Yet, despite this progress, women remain severely under-represented across levels of management in clean energy companies. In renewable energy companies in sub-Saharan Africa, women hold 25% of leadership roles and 26% of middle and lower-level manager roles², respectively. A key to unlocking parity across these levels is to focus on how women, the sector and the surrounding enabling environment can focus on how to advance and retain women to ensure they are recognized and promoted for their valuable contributions.

This report builds our previous report, "[Bottlenecks and Breakthroughs: Advancing Gender Equity in African Clean Energy](#)," and tries to further address what limits women's advancement and retention. It also draws upon the broader literature on the topic as well as our own hands-on hiring and program experience and conversations with sector employees and experts. For this report, we spoke to six climate and energy companies, 85 current female candidates, and 120 previous placements to understand their long-term income gains. Within this report, readers will find a framework for understanding the causes of gender inequity in African clean energy, as well as stories and perspectives from current, former, and prospective female employees in the clean energy sector to better understand how women can be better recognized, while also offering approaches and interventions which may help. We've also included the sector's first pay equity analysis, providing the industry's first baseline from which we can evaluate future programs and interventions to support women's employment in green jobs. Finally, we draw conclusions on some areas of opportunity as we seek to create a more equitable and inclusive clean energy sector for female employees, and all under-represented candidate segments.

We hope that these insights help companies, investors and donors reflect on their work and where there are opportunities to enhance gender equity in the clean energy workforce.

What's Going Well

- Companies are adopting more inclusive practices, such as flexible working hours, implementing safety measures, and hiring women into traditionally male-dominated roles.
- Women have proven they can excel in these positions, overcoming initial challenges and adjusting to traditionally male-dominated roles.
- With direct intervention, women are earning on average 95% of male's earnings for similar roles and jobs in the sector.

Persistent Challenges

- There is a lack of structured, proactive training programs for junior and mid-level staff, with companies often reacting to specific areas where employees need improvement.
- Promotion policies can be unclear and inconsistent, leading to dissatisfaction and frustration among employees.
- There is a lack of effective communication and feedback on how junior staff can grow within their roles and be promoted, reducing opportunities for advancement.
- There are fewer women in leadership roles, thereby demotivating women as they are unable to see growth opportunities for themselves in the sector.
- Without a maintained focus on women's pay equity at companies, we have found that women earn less compared to their male peers for similar work over time.

Pathways Forward

- Companies and donors may consider prioritizing providing skills and training for advancement, focusing on leadership, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and project management to enhance overall workplace effectiveness.
- There is a need to increase recognition and visibility for junior staff, offering mentorship and coaching programs, showcasing role models, and providing networking opportunities for women to connect, share and learn from each other.
- Implementing clear and transparent promotion policies, offering career development opportunities, and addressing gender pay gaps can help to ensure women receive equal compensation for equal work.



Creating Career Pathways for Women: From Entry to Advancement and Retention

In recent years, the sector has made significant strides in promoting gender equity. This is due to increased donor interest, the coalescing around gender criteria for investments³, and a growing understanding that a more diverse workforce results in improved business outcomes for companies⁴. Companies have also taken it on themselves to tackle how to better attract, retain and advance women workers. They have broadened marketing approaches, innovated in how they manage applications and interviews, investigated biases in outreach and hiring, developed gender action plans, and looked for other ways to increase female workforce representation.



These efforts are having an impact. Companies today are better at attracting and hiring women into roles, developing internal gender action plans, adjusting workplace policies to be more inclusive and ensuring greater pay and promotion equity.⁵ However, many of the companies we spoke with still struggle with how to continue to support women after they have been placed into a role. We have found that can be attributed to:

- **Cultural barriers which often prevent junior staff, specifically women,** from sharing their thoughts and opinions with companies directly, and companies feeling unsure of how to encourage women to speak up.
- **The recent investment downturn and poor macroeconomic conditions which have resulted in a lack of funding** for companies, limiting their ability to invest in development.
- Leadership teams **lacking bandwidth to act as mentors and coaches to junior staff,** or design and implement relevant training.
- **Female employees often feel locked out of growth opportunities** which would help them progress. These opportunities include: leadership courses, career advice, training around the energy and climate sector, and networking events to learn and meet peers.

As investments in climate and clean energy grow in Africa, the opportunity for women will only increase, and the need to seriously consider how to advance and retain women will grow. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) projects that the clean energy sector will produce around 19 million new jobs between 2017 and 2050. However, IRENA has found that currently only 32% of full-time jobs in the clean energy sector are held by women.⁶ Similarly, GOGLA has estimated that off-grid solar alone could create 1.3 million jobs in South Asia, East, West, and Central Africa by 2022 and that under current hiring trends, about 27% of jobs would be held by women.⁷

Green jobs for women present an immense opportunity for the continent – and it is an economic and policy imperative for countries in Africa to maximize the potential of their human capital.

Should women continue to capture a fuller part of the green economies labor market share, we can expect to see:

-  **Sustained Economic Growth:** Closing the gender gap in employment could significantly increase GDP and enhance productivity and competitiveness in Africa. The McKinsey Global Institute has found that if women were to participate in the economy at the same rate as men, their contributions could add as much as USD 28 trillion globally.⁸ This also helps harness Africa's demographic dividend, benefitting from a larger working-age population and its economic advantages. It is estimated that increasing the female employment rates in OECD countries to match that of Sweden, could boost GDP by over USD 6 trillion.⁹
-  **Poverty Reduction:** Women's increased labor force participation can help alleviate poverty by improving access to income-generating activities and essential services for themselves and their families.
-  **Women's Empowerment and Equality:** Greater participation in the labor market empowers women, providing economic independence, decision-making power and improved social status.
-  **Skills Development:** More women joining the labor market drives investment in education and skills, breaking barriers and enabling their contributions to diverse sectors.
-  **Reduced Gender-Based Violence:** In some circumstances, increasing women's incomes can decrease instances of gender-based violence by improving women's bargaining power and fostering equitable relationships.

Framing the Challenge

As mentioned above, this report builds off our previous report, "[Bottlenecks and Breakthroughs: Advancing Gender Equity in African Clean Energy](#)." While that paper focused on how to address pipeline and hiring challenges women face when entering the sector, this report is focused on workplace challenges that limit women's advancement and retention. The below is the framework we used in our original research to understand these dynamics, and was based on, and informed by, our secondary research and literature review, conversations with clean energy companies, interviews with dozens of clean energy sector workers, discussion with our project partners at Value for Women and GEAPP, and Shortlist's experience hiring thousands of professionals across Africa.

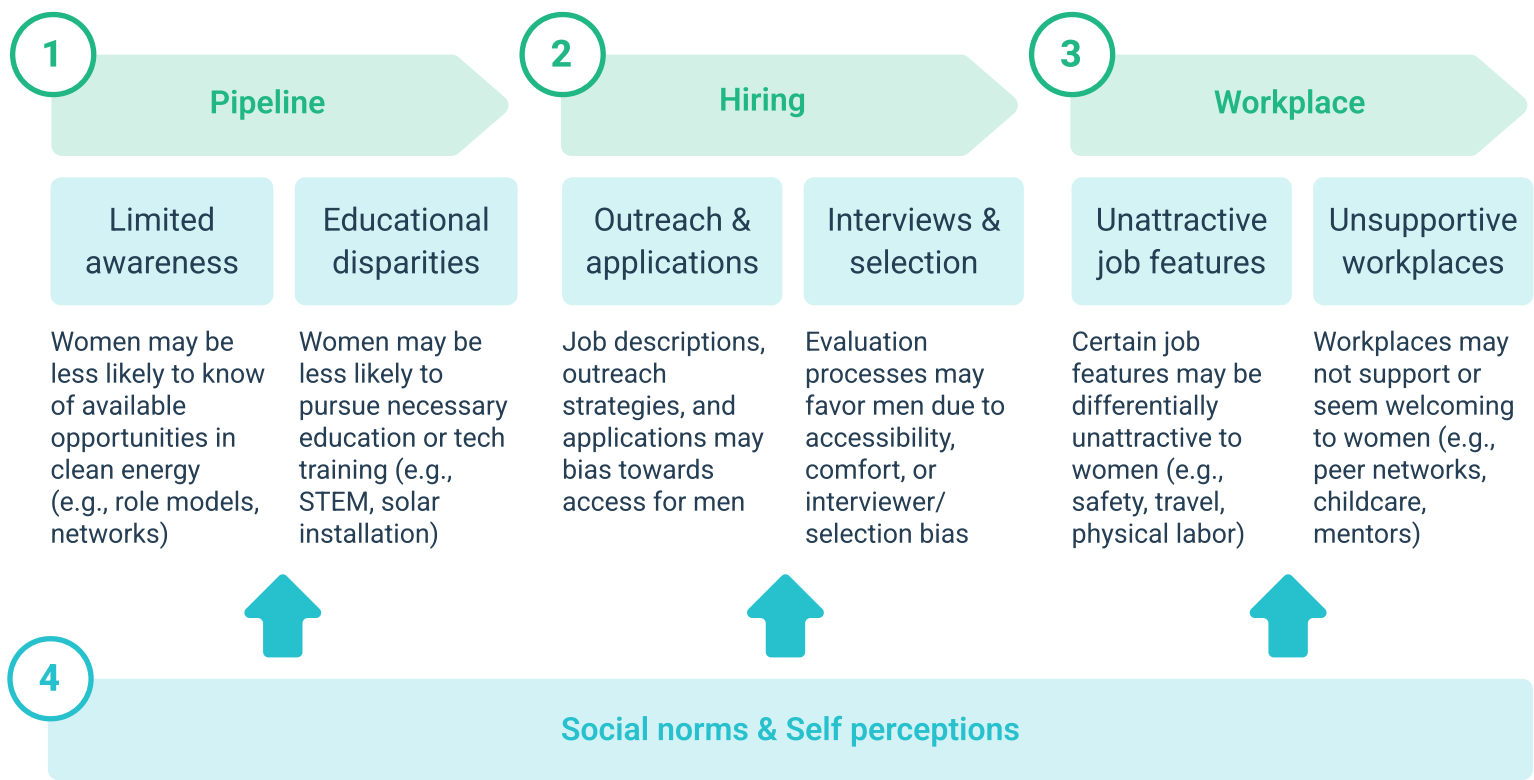


Figure 1: A framework for considering the drivers of gender inequity in the clean energy workforce

We identified four broad categories of causal factors, relating to: (1) Pipeline, (2) Hiring, (3) Workplace, and (4) Self-Perceptions & Social Norms. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on category four which is described in detail below.

Workplace challenges

Beyond the hiring process, women face many unique challenges once on the job that can impact their ability to advance and be retained. For women who secure jobs, workplaces can vary in their degree of inclusivity and benefits that support and meet women's needs, which can further limit their progression and retention in roles.

- 1 Unattractive job features.** Women sometimes self-select out of jobs or drop out of a job or industry when the job features on offer interfere with women's often uneven care work burdens or require them to break with gender norms around travel, manual labor, or intensive social interaction. The realities of fieldwork, travel and physical labor pose a challenge to many energy companies.¹⁰ And overtime, such challenges can dissuade women from continuing to stay in a role. However, some are finding solutions that, for example, place women close to their home villages and provide transportation solutions that make these jobs more workable.¹¹ Sometimes women must convince their families that the job is safe and suitable for them to undertake.¹²
- 2 Unsupportive workplaces.** Once on the job, retaining women requires a supportive workplace along unique dimensions. Often in male-dominated fields, women face harassment or hostility from colleagues and even customers. They may be excluded from information sharing networks and may not acquire the same skills they need to thrive in their roles. In a male-dominated space, women may feel they are asked to take on personality characteristics—being extra firm or cold or more competitive with peers—to fit within the existing culture or defy expectations of their unsuitable 'feminine' traits.¹³

Shortlist's research on how to enable career advancement for women in Kenya has found consistent themes women face when aligning their familial needs with their career.¹⁴ First is that rigid working hours and inflexibility with work locations limit women's ability to balance familial commitments and work responsibilities; women often bear the burden of disproportionate childcare and home management responsibilities. This is compounded by the fact that many women have inadequate access to child and elder care, which further limits women's ability to fully participate at work. Secondly, women's uneven share of home responsibilities often makes it harder for them to take advantage of new work opportunities, training, and extracurricular activities that are associated with advancement. Third, while there is growing recognition of women's material responsibilities, employers continue to overlook other family obligations – for all employees, regardless of gender, as men with care responsibilities can also suffer. Finally, women's aspirations and values often differ from those of their male peers. In Kenya for example, while many Kenyan women are motivated to go back to work after family leave due to financial considerations, they are also typically factoring in time and non-cash benefits such as flexibility, pension, medical cover, and staff meals in their decision making.



Our Approach: Perspectives From Female Employees and Employers



We sought to deepen this conceptual understanding with more textured perspectives direct from women in the clean energy sector, including current and former employees. Additionally, we also took perspectives from men within the sector to compare whether there is a gender bias. The individuals we spoke to were based in Nigeria, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda and held a range of various roles in sales, customer service, management, technical and warehouse and logistics roles (see more in Table 1 below). The average age of these women is 27 with 3 years of prior experience. These “voices from the field” provide richer texture and insight into how these barriers show up in the experiences of young women across Africa, and hint at ways towards a more equitable future.

Roles Represented

Management and Business Roles

- Project Manager
- Loan Collection Agent
- Business Systems Associate
- HR Officer
- Response Officer
- Response Team Leader
- Field Territory Retention Executive

Technical Roles

- Data Analyst
- IT Officer
- Technician
- Mechanical/Electrical Engineer
- Design Engineer

Sales Roles

- Sales Agent
- Sales Representative
- Sales Manager
- Regional Sales Manager

Warehouse and Logistics Roles

- Quality Control Specialists
- Regional Stock Controller
- Head of Warehousing and Logistics

Customer Service

- Customer Care Representative
- Customer Care Executive
- Customer Care Specialist
- Relationship Associate

Table 1. Roles Represented by Women Employees Interviewed



Our research methodology was three-pronged, which enabled us to collect qualitative and quantitative data, and gain insights from companies and female and male workers. Specifically we:

- 1 Interviewed 6 clean energy companies in Africa to better understand how they support the career journey for women in the sector, the challenges they face and what kind of additional support they would require to support the development of junior and mid-level women. All the companies we spoke to have women in leadership positions.
- 2 Collected survey responses from 85 respondents, of which 52 were women, to understand their career growth within the sector through the placements we have made in our clean energy programs and what further support they would require or want to further their growth.
- 3 Collected income data from 77 individuals we placed through Off Grid Talent Initiative (OGTI) program which we wrapped up in 2020, to understand if the individuals still work in the clean energy sector and if they had seen an increase in career prospects and salary.

It is important to note, that due to the nature of the W4GJ program, the companies we spoke to tend to be leaders in the field of women's representation across the sector. This may influence some of the reports findings, but underscores the importance of developing and championing companies in the sector who are working to advance women's interests.



Building on Success: Advancing Women in Climate and Clean Energy

In delving into the advancement challenges faced by women in clean energy companies across Africa, it's crucial to spotlight the divergent career paths for men and women in this sector. As women embark on their professional journeys within clean energy, they often encounter distinct roadblocks that hinder their progression beyond entry-level roles. These hurdles stem from myriad factors, including societal norms, ingrained gender biases, and structural inequities entrenched within organizations.

Our work exploring the barriers along the career trajectories of women within clean energy companies has revealed an evolving landscape. While initial steps may seem promising, women still encounter formidable obstacles on their journeys toward senior leadership positions. Women's access to opportunities such as skill enrichment, project leadership, and effective networking are pivotal markers for career growth, yet remain out of reach for many women. Women also contend with limited access to mentorship, unequal avenues for training, and pervasive gender stereotypes that undermine their professional journey.

Unpacking these milestones and barriers underscores the intricate dynamics at play within clean energy organizations across Africa. By recognizing these challenges, we can pave the way for meaningful change and foster an environment conducive to the advancement and retention of women in the sector. Thoughtful strategies aimed at addressing systemic biases and promoting gender equity are essential for harnessing the full potential of women in driving innovation and sustainability within the clean energy landscape.

Skills and Training for Advancement

The clean energy sector is rapidly growing, with new and innovative products and solutions being developed at breakneck speed. Such an environment necessitates a need for innovative and agile individuals required to implement these solutions. According to a report written by McKinsey, leaders in today's energy sector require a unique blend of traditional and emerging leadership capabilities to navigate this ever-changing landscape successfully. Key skills needed include forward-thinking, innovation, collaboration, and adaptability – attributes that enable organizations to thrive amid disruption and drive transformative change in a rapidly evolving energy environment.¹⁵

However, there is a significant skills gap, both in technical and soft skills, for women working in the energy sector, putting them at a disadvantage when it comes to career progression.

Traditionally, the majority of jobs held by women in this industry have been in desk roles, such as administrative, finance, or HR positions, or as sales agents. Technical roles, such as installation, maintenance, and troubleshooting of systems, remain predominantly male-dominated and have not been traditional career pathways for women.

Soft skills, such as leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, are also crucial for success in the energy sector. While this issue is not exclusive to women, studies have shown that when women lack these skills compared to their male counterparts, they face significant barriers to growth and advancement.

“People need to be curious and focused on being solution oriented. They have to be more creative and emotionally intelligent, this will set them up for success.”

- Senior Leader, Climate Financing Company

In our interviews with leading clean energy companies, we found that they all recognized the importance of training and development for their junior and mid-level staff. However, there is often a lack of structured, proactive training programs for companies across the sector. Many companies offer specific product knowledge training, as it directly impacts sales, but other training efforts tend to be reactive, addressing specific areas where employees need improvement.

“Small companies need capacity building [in addition to subsidizing the cost of hiring through stipends]. One off stipends are helpful but not a sustainable solution on their own to bring results and generate revenue.”

- CEO, Clean Cooking Company

“As the company develops and we move out of the startup stage we can devote more money to development of staff.”

- Senior Leader, Minigrad Company

Our survey of female employees in the clean energy sector revealed a resounding desire for leadership training to help them progress in their careers and break through the glass ceiling. In our experience, few companies have the budgets or internal capacity to develop training for their employees. This leaves a gap for other players across the ecosystem to develop innovative approaches and financing mechanisms to support companies' unique internal human capital challenges and allow them to access outside resources.

For example, well-designed mentorship and coaching programs can bridge this gap by providing tailor-made and specific support that matches female employee and company needs. Some of the common areas we've identified that need support include:

- Providing opportunities for women to work across various workstreams, gaining diverse experience and exposure.
- Offering coaching support for soft skill development such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and project management to enhance overall effectiveness in the workplace.
- Developing leadership communities to empower women and connect them to other female leaders, so they can share learnings and experience to take on managerial roles and advance in their careers.
- Building on the skills and knowledge of individuals in specific renewable energy fields, enhancing their employability and credibility in the job market.

By investing in human capital solutions tailored to the unique needs of women in the clean energy sector, companies can unlock a wealth of untapped potential, foster a more diverse and inclusive workforce and drive innovation and success in the rapidly evolving energy landscape.

Limited Recognition and Visibility

Employee recognition and development are crucial for retaining and nurturing junior and mid-level talent. While there are various initiatives companies can implement to promote employee growth, such as recognition programs, coaching and mentorship opportunities, networking events, and salary increments, these can be challenging to execute, especially for startups and fast-paced industries like clean energy that are more nascent.

Startups, including those in the clean energy sector, often face intense pressure to survive and outpace competitors in rapidly evolving markets. This leaves little bandwidth for leadership teams to focus on long-term employee development and recognition.

"The market is currently very fast-paced and innovative. I need to be thinking ahead of my competitors. I need to get into the carbon credit market before my competitors so I do not run out of business."

- CEO, Clean Cooking Company


"As an early-stage startup, the leadership team is very focused on fundraising, sales, and their revenue. They do not have the bandwidth to really support their team and further develop their skills despite them wanting to."

- Senior Leader, Climate Finance Company

In addition to being such a fast-paced sector, the energy sector is heavily male-dominated, which has resulted in few women in leadership positions. Not only does this lack of visibility discourage women in junior and mid-level positions from seeking advancement because they have few women to look up to, but it also means that there has been no meaningful demonstration effect normalizing women holding these positions. Women also face educational disparities compared to men in this space. Particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, as well as technical positions like solar installation and maintenance, women are not receiving education at equal rates compared to men. This unequal training contributes to a shortage of qualified female candidates for technical and engineering roles in clean energy.

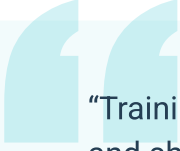


Finally, while all the junior and mid-level talent have managers they report to on their progress, they have limited conversations on what metrics need to be hit for them to be promoted. For many, they also lack proper structures for receiving feedback on how they can be more effective in their role. This lack of effective communication on how junior staff can grow within their roles to be promoted reduces the availability of opportunities for them to do so.



“Junior staff have regular manager meetings but this is oriented to their KPIs. It would be worth being more direct on how they can grow and how leaders can guide them to the path to success.”

- Senior Leader, Climate Product Financing Company



“Training and coaching should cut across on how [employees] can improve and show them how to support junior staff.”

- CEO, Solar Company



Promotion Policies

One of the challenges that early-stage startups face is how to reward and retain their junior and mid-level female talent. Promotions are a common way to recognize the achievements and contributions of employees, as well as to motivate them to take on more responsibilities and leadership roles. However, promotions in early-stage startups often happen on an ad hoc basis, mainly due to the lack of HR infrastructure. This means there is no clear and consistent process for evaluating performance, setting expectations, and communicating career paths. As a result, promotions may seem arbitrary, unfair, or biased, leading to dissatisfaction, frustration, and turnover among employees. According to our survey, we found that half respondents were either unclear on how to be promoted or only had a small idea of what it took to be promoted within the company they work for.

Additionally, we have seen that companies also tend to give promotions “in name only” – a better title and more responsibility, but without a raise or change to their compensation. While this is meaningful in terms of elevating women into more senior roles and leadership positions, it does not fully support women’s economic progression in the workplace. Some of the reasons why an employer may offer a promotion without a raise may include that:

- 1 The promotion may be a sign of recognition and appreciation for the employee's performance and potential, but the company may not have the budget or the policy to increase the salary at the same time.
- 2 The promotion could be a way to test the employee's abilities and fit for the new role, with the salary increase following after a successful probation period or a performance review.
- 3 The promotion could be a lateral move that does not entail a significant change in responsibilities or skills but rather a different focus or scope of work.
- 4 The promotion may be a strategic decision to align the employee's title with market standards or the expectations of external stakeholders, such as clients or partners. When speaking to our placements, we noticed that several individuals were offered promotions in title, but not in terms of their compensation.

While these promotions in name only provide meaningful recognition to female workers for their contributions, the lack of additional compensation may exacerbate inequality for female employees compared to their male peers, and should be monitored to ensure pay equity.



Professional Development Opportunities

Recognizing the need to address gender inequalities and empower women in the energy sector, several initiatives have emerged across Africa to provide support, training, and leadership development opportunities. Through our W4GJ initiative we have collaborated with the African Management Institute to offer a 6-month leadership program. The Future Female Leaders in Energy Program,¹⁶ which combines online courses and experiential workshops to equip young women in entry-level roles within the energy sector with the necessary skills to become future senior leaders. The program focuses on developing leadership, communication, and technical skills, as well as providing access to industry professionals and role models to inspire and guide the participants on their career paths.

Other programs that aim to equip women with the skills, knowledge, and guidance necessary to thrive in their careers and overcome barriers include:

- 1 [The Women in Renewable Energy in Africa \(W-REA\)](#) Mentoring Program is a 12-month initiative that provides guidance, feedback, and advocacy for women working in the renewable energy sector across sub-Saharan Africa. The program aims to empower women in the industry by offering mentorship, networking opportunities, and support to help them advance their careers and overcome challenges in a male-dominated field.
- 2 [The Energy Sector Women's Leadership Initiative](#) (ESWLI) is a training course designed to equip women with essential skills and knowledge to thrive and grow in their careers within the energy sector in Nigeria. The program aims to address the gender gap in the industry by providing training on leadership, negotiation, project management, and other critical areas, enabling women to take on more prominent roles and contribute to the development of the energy sector in the country.
- 3 [The Women in Oil and Energy South Africa](#) (WOESA) is an organization that offers various services to its member companies, organizations, and individuals, with a focus on developing a knowledge base and building capacity among women through education and training. WOESA provides resources, networking opportunities, and support to help women in the oil and energy industry in South Africa advance their careers, gain leadership skills, and overcome gender-related barriers.

Leadership Opportunities

In sub-Saharan Africa, female entrepreneurship sits at 26% for women.¹⁷ However, as most women-led enterprises are low-growth small businesses, this figure under-represents high-growth tech startups led by women. Recent data indicates that only 14% of African startups are led by women.¹⁸ They also receive less capital compared to their male-led counterparts. According to The Big Deal,¹⁹ African startups with a female CEO raised merely 3.9% of the total funds raised by African startups in 2022, a decrease in both absolute (\$290 million) and relative (6.3%) terms from 2021. This is despite evidence suggesting that women-founded or gender-diverse businesses outperform male-founded and male-dominated businesses, ultimately generating higher revenues than those founded by men.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within the African energy sector, with less than one in four leadership positions held by women. This lack of representation has far reaching consequences. Without sufficient female role models and mentors, it becomes increasingly challenging to attract and retain a diverse workforce. Aspiring women in the sector may struggle to envision career growth, advancement and leadership opportunities, thereby leading some to consider switching to other fields. Having more women in senior leadership positions can open doors for other women by providing mentorship, sponsorship, and visibility into pathways for career progression. Female leaders can actively champion initiatives to recruit, develop, and promote women, creating a more supportive environment. Through leading by example and lifting other women, female leaders across industries can inspire women entering the energy space, encourage retention, and help cultivate a robust pipeline of women for future leadership roles.

Through our W4GJ program, we consciously partnered with companies that have women in leadership positions. We exclusively place women in these organizations as a strategic step to promote more female representation in an otherwise traditionally male-dominated sector. By doing so, we not only increase the number of women in the industry but also ensure that they have access to role models and mentors who can guide their career growth. Our approach aims to create an environment where women can thrive, learn from experienced leaders, and envision themselves in leadership roles. By placing women in companies with existing female leadership, we hope to create a supportive network that encourages retention, professional development, and the cultivation of a robust pipeline of women for future leadership positions.



Employee Retention

When exploring retention challenges for women in clean energy companies across Africa, understanding the influence of workplace culture is paramount. The culture within clean energy organizations plays a pivotal role in shaping job satisfaction and retention rates for women. A supportive and inclusive work environment can be a powerful catalyst for retaining female talent and fostering their professional growth.

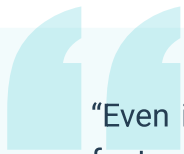
Examining the impact of workplace culture can have profound effects on how we evaluate job satisfaction and retention among women. Cultures that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion tend to cultivate a sense of belonging and empowerment among female employees. Conversely, environments marred by gender biases, discrimination and lack of opportunities for advancement can erode job satisfaction and fuel attrition rates among women.

Identifying specific cultural attributes that contribute to a supportive and inclusive work environment is key to enhancing retention efforts for women. Cultures that promote transparency, open communication, and equitable access to resources foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among female employees. Moreover, initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership development opportunities and flexible work arrangements contribute to a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture, enhancing job satisfaction and retention rates for women in the clean energy sector.

By prioritizing the cultivation of a positive and inclusive workplace culture, clean energy companies can effectively retain female talent, capitalize on diverse perspectives and drive innovation and sustainability in Africa's energy landscape.

Workplace Culture

Building an inclusive workplace culture is critical for attracting and retaining top female talent. From open communication that empowers women to share their voices, to family-friendly policies like paid maternity leave and flexible work arrangements that support work-life balance, to proactive measures for preventing harassment – these elements create an environment where women feel valued, supported, and able to thrive in their careers. This is especially important in male-dominated industries, where women may face unique challenges. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and support, organizations can demonstrate their commitment to the growth and advancement of their female employees, increasing engagement, productivity and long-term retention.



“Even if the pay is low, my company’s work culture is inclusive, they foster our growth and this makes me want to stay.”

- Female employee, Ag-energy Company

Having open communication: Youth talent is a valuable asset for any organization, but it often goes untapped and unrecognized. Many young workers, especially women, face challenges in expressing their needs, aspirations, and opinions in the workplace. They may be afraid to speak up and ask for feedback, guidance, or opportunities to grow and advance in their careers. They may also hesitate to share their innovative ideas and perspectives, fearing rejection or criticism. From our research, we found that this is a cultural issue.



Friendly maternity leave policies: Implementing family-friendly policies such as maternity leave is one of the strongest tools companies can implement to increase women's retention. When companies offer maternity pay, it can significantly boost the recruitment and retention of female employees, especially when combined with other benefits such as coaching and mentoring support for maternity returners and providing a phased return to work. These policies enable working parents, particularly mothers, to advance in their careers. Our research also found that when employees feel supported during significant life transitions like parenthood, they are more likely to stay with the organization – even when presented with jobs that offer more pay. Additionally, employees with access to flexible work arrangements tend to be more committed and engaged, contributing to innovation and productivity. While most of the female employees we spoke to were able to take maternity leave (86%), it is important to mention that they are working for a range of companies participating in a program supporting women's employment, and/or had the means and support necessary to encourage them to come back to work. This is in stark contrast to the typical experience of a working female in Africa where it is estimated that only 16% of women are able to take maternity leave.²⁰

“I recently took a break for maternity leave, for 3 months. During my maternity leave my manager was very supportive. She checked up on me and my company also offered paid maternity leave.”

- Female employee, Ag-energy Company

“I recently took paid maternity leave. When I came back [from leave] there was no impact on [my] salary.”

- Female employee, Solar Company

Work from home policies: Allowing employees to work from home has proven to be a key factor in retention. Research from the Harvard Business Review indicates that remote workers tend to be more productive, more willing to work overtime and most likely to stay with a business longer than colleagues who work in office.²¹ Beyond financial savings, such as reduced infrastructure costs, remote work offers benefits like flexible schedules, zero-commuting stress and a better work-life balance. This is specifically beneficial for women who typically have families and larger caretaker responsibilities compared to men. However, the concept of working from home has not been highly encouraged in Africa post-COVID for junior and mid-level talent. This has been attributed to it being difficult to track whether employees are working, and in some cases, the outputs have been minimal. Of course, there may be other risks or costs to getting rid of office-time altogether, such as degradation of culture, weaker peer and team learning opportunities and less social cohesion contributing to greater overall attrition.

“We have a remote work location initiative that enables employees to work from home upon agreement with their line manager. This has been difficult to rigorously monitor.”

- HR Manager, Renewable Energy Ecosystem Innovation Company

Harassment: Creating and maintaining a supportive workplace environment is crucial for retaining women, especially in fields traditionally dominated by men. In such industries, women commonly encounter unique challenges, including harassment or hostility from clients and customers. Fostering an inclusive culture that proactively addresses these issues is essential for attracting and retaining top female talent. This is particularly true for women who are sales agents – one of the most common high-volume forms of work we’ve seen women take on in the sector. When we spoke directly with companies, they validated that their female employees who are sales agents tend to face harassment when they speak to male customers. Therefore most of the companies provide support to their female employees to avoid such types of circumstances; this has included training on how to deal with male customers and providing SIM cards and phones so they do not use their personal number as this can lead to harassment calls.



Equal Pay and Benefits

The gender pay gap in the African energy sector is alarming. Women working in this field earn substantially less than their male counterparts – even after accounting for factors such as ability, education, and potential experience, the wage disparity persists. On average, wages for women in the energy sector are 20% lower than those for men.²² This gap is even wider than in non-energy sectors. Addressing this issue is crucial for achieving gender parity and ensuring fair compensation for all employees. When analyzing our data we found that 100% of employers stated that they do not differentiate their pay by gender, but rather by role and capability. However, from our employee survey, more than 40% of female employees believe that they are not fairly compensated when compared to their male counterparts. Such mismatches in policy and perception point to a need to better align expectations between management and employees to ensure transparency and open communication.

Income Parity Research and Analysis

We have sought to understand income parity for the women we have directly placed through W4GJ. To conduct this research we selected a random sample of male and female employees we have placed into roles in our 5+ years of talent programming, with a 50% split of male and female respondents across Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. To ensure comparability and to arrive at the most uniform data set, we asked respondents a series of questions around their years of experience, levels of education and hours worked. Additionally, to ensure data is comparable across countries we used the 2023 Purchasing Power Parity Ratio (PPP), published by the International Monetary Fund, to convert the earnings in local currency to USD.²³

Findings from the analysis reveal that third-party interventions such as the Women for Green Jobs program play a crucial role in maintaining income parity between male and female employees. A comparison between Table 1 and Table 2 (both below) indicates that Shortlist's intervention and program significantly minimized compensation disparities between genders. While intervention positively impacted the lives of both male and female candidates, women tended to benefit less, experiencing a 116% growth in hourly earnings post-program, compared to 131% for men after a successful placement.



Country	F	M	Grand Total
Kenya	3.86	4.54	4.10
Nigeria	3.09	3.21	3.18
Sierra Leone	2.65	2.65	2.65
Tanzania	3.52	3.52	3.52
Grand Total (in USD)	3.74	3.92	3.82

Table 1: Average Hourly Rate (on placement) with Shortlist Intervention (Adjusted for PPP)






Country	F	M	Grand Total
Kenya	8.08	11.92	9.42
Nigeria	6.19	6.34	6.30
Sierra Leone	2.79	5.30	4.46
Tanzania	4.70	4.31	4.46
Grand Total (in USD)	7.59	9.05	8.25

Table 2: Average Hourly Rate (After placement) without Shortlist Intervention (Adjusted for PPP)

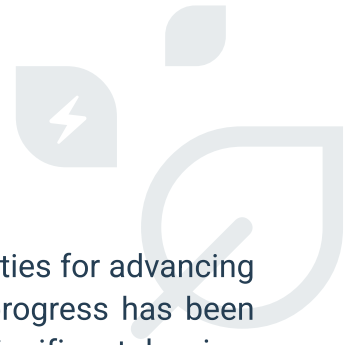
In our conversations with female candidates, we found they encounter barriers in negotiating better pay, potentially stemming from unidentified performance hurdles. While all respondents confirmed promotions during their tenure, only a minority of female candidates reported increments exceeding the average of 31%, compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, female candidates may require enhanced guidance on long-term career development paths, as evidenced by the higher frequency of function changes during service tenure, resulting in below-average growth rates in earning capacity. Finally, career breaks disproportionately affect female candidates, with all respondents experiencing stagnant or reduced earnings during these periods, underscoring the need for tailored support mechanisms to address gender-specific challenges within the clean energy workforce.

Measures to Address Gender Pay Gaps

Based on our work and research placing women into roles at clean energy companies, we have found that there are several policies and initiatives companies can employ to address the gender pay gap. Depending on a company's size, maturity and resources, measures could include:

-  **Equal pay policies:** Establishing and enforcing transparent pay policies that ensure equal compensation for equal work can support companies to achieve pay equity. Coupling these with regular pay audits can help to identify and address disparities that may occur as the employee base grows and evolves.
-  **Promote career advancement:** By encouraging women's mobility within the sector, companies can support female workers to advance their careers. This can be achieved via mentorship programs, leadership coaching and growth opportunities.
-  **Flexible work arrangements:** Recognizing the importance of work-life balance can be a powerful way to encourage women's retention. We've found that by offering flexible schedules, remote work options and family-friendly policies, women are more likely to stay in a job or company.
-  **Diverse hiring practices:** Actively recruiting and promoting women to positions of leadership can have knock-on effects for younger women in organizations who may not otherwise have role models to look up to or feel connected to. This can take time, so setting targets for gender representation at all levels over a longer-term time horizon can help to combat this.
-  **Data collection and reporting:** Regularly assessing and reporting data related to gender (such as salary, retention, career progression, sexual harassment, percentage of women across job levels, etc.) can help companies to identify the areas in which they are excelling or falling behind in terms of gender equity in the policies and initiatives.

Summary and Recommendations



Summary

This report delves into the persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for advancing and retaining women in the clean energy sector across Africa. While progress has been made in attracting and hiring more women into entry-level roles, significant barriers continue to hinder their career advancement and long-term retention within the industry.

A central finding is that the limited awareness and educational disparities that prevent a robust pipeline of women from entering the clean energy workforce, particularly in technical and STEM-related roles. Women's lower awareness of general and specific opportunities in male-dominated sectors, coupled with biases and social norms that influence their perceptions, contribute to this issue. Additionally, women are not being educated at the same rates as men in STEM fields and technical roles like solar installation and maintenance, further limiting the pool of qualified female candidates.

We also found that there are a multitude of challenges within the hiring processes of clean energy companies. Biased outreach methods, such as relying heavily on word-of-mouth from male-dominated networks, can limit the diversity of applicants. Job descriptions are often written in ways that implicitly attract men and can dissuade women from applying. Interview processes can be influenced by biases, particularly when there are few or no women involved in interview panels or as interviewers.

Workplace cultures are also often unsupportive of women's needs, presenting challenges around inflexible schedules, lack of mentorship, harassment, and exclusion from informal networks that facilitate career growth. Self-perceptions and social norms continue to influence women's confidence in pursuing careers in male-dominated sectors and their willingness to advocate for growth opportunities. Gendered expectations and biases can shape women's self-doubt and lead them to opt out of careers early, despite their potential to succeed.

Finally, while companies recognize the importance of training and development, the report notes a lack of structured programs, and leadership teams often lack the bandwidth to serve as mentors for junior and mid-level talent. Promotion policies are frequently ad hoc and unclear, leading to perceptions of unfairness and bias among employees. Additionally, pay gaps persist, with women earning substantially less than their male counterparts even in similar roles.

Despite these challenges, there have been several positive steps taken by companies and organizations. These include the implementation of leadership development programs, targeted education and training initiatives and growing recognition of the business benefits of gender diversity. Companies are also innovating with inclusive policies, flexible work arrangements and gender-specific support to create more supportive environments for women.

The report emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to further advance and retain women in the clean energy workforce. This approach should focus on raising awareness and expanding educational pathways for women in STEM and technical fields through targeted outreach, mentorship and scholarships. Addressing biases in hiring processes through anonymous screening, inclusive job descriptions, diverse interview panels and competency-based evaluations is also crucial.

Of course, there is still a strong need to foster supportive workplace cultures through anti-harassment policies, flexible work arrangements, equal opportunities for training and advancement and initiatives to amplify women's voices to achieve equity. Challenging self-perceptions and social norms through role models, leadership development programs and community engagement can help shift mindsets and encourage women to pursue careers in the clean energy sector.

Finally, within companies, implementing structured training, mentorship, and clear promotion policies to support women's career growth is vital. Conducting regular pay equity audits and adjusting compensation to eliminate gender-based pay gaps is also necessary. Finally, the report emphasizes the importance of encouraging greater representation of women in leadership roles and decision-making positions within the industry.

Recommendations

To further advance and retain women in the clean energy workforce, a comprehensive approach is needed, focusing on:

- 1 Raising awareness and expanding educational pathways for women in STEM and technical fields through targeted outreach, mentorship, and scholarships.
- 2 Addressing biases in hiring processes through anonymous screening, inclusive job descriptions, diverse interview panels, and competency-based evaluations.
- 3 Fostering supportive workplace cultures through anti-harassment policies, flexible work arrangements, equal opportunities for training and advancement, and initiatives to amplify women's voices.
- 4 Challenging self-perceptions and social norms through role models, leadership development programs, and community engagement.
- 5 Implementing structured training, mentorship, and clear promotion policies within companies to support women's career growth.
- 6 Conducting regular pay equity audits and adjusting compensation to eliminate gender-based pay gaps.
- 7 Encouraging greater representation of women in leadership roles and decision-making positions within the industry.

By addressing these challenges holistically, the clean energy sector can unlock the immense potential of women's contributions, fostering innovation, sustainability, and economic development across Africa.

Endnotes

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