



INTRODUCTION

Global South refers broadly to regions in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania that share historical, economic, and social challenges of underdevelopment. These areas often experience higher poverty rates, limited access to education, and inadequate energy infrastructure compared to their Global North counterparts. Access to clean, affordable, and reliable energy underpins health, education, and economic growth. Yet Youth and women—particularly in rural and marginalized communities—remain disproportionately excluded from energy access, education on sustainable practices, and policy decision-making.

For instance, globally, **675 million people lack electricity**, most in Sub-Saharan Africa. Women and young girls bear the heaviest burden, managing household energy under conditions that affect **equity, opportunity, and dignity**.

This policy brief highlights two interconnected challenges:

1. Barriers youth and women face in accessing clean energy.
2. The urgent need for women and youth's inclusion in energy decision-making.

Empowering women and youth in both access and governance is critical for achieving **sustainable development, gender equality, and climate resilience**.

KEY CHALLENGES IN WOMEN'S ENERGY ACCESS

1. Economic Barriers

- Limited access to finance restricts adoption of clean technologies such as solar systems and improved cookstoves.
- Only 37% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa have a bank account compared to 48% of men, reflecting deep financial exclusion.

2. Limited access to education

- Limited access to quality education in many areas presents a significant barrier. Lacking a foundational understanding of climate science and sustainable practices, communities often inadvertently engage in activities that cause environmental degradation

3. Social and Cultural Constraints

- Gender norms often prevent women from making household energy decisions or engaging with providers and technicians.

4. Information and Awareness Gaps

- Lower literacy and limited outreach hinder women's access to energy knowledge. In Uganda for instance,, female literacy is 71% versus 82% for men.
- The gender gap results in disproportionate impacts on women and youth, increasing their vulnerability. Across the Caribbean, access to clean cooking fuels and technologies is consistently poor. This disparity is acute in Haiti, where fewer than 10% of people have access to these clean solutions¹.

5. Time Poverty and Health Risks

- Women globally spend 200 million hours daily collecting firewood and water. Household air pollution causes 3.2 million premature deaths each year, mostly among women and children.

6. Infrastructural and Geographic Inequities

- Energy access is concentrated in urban areas (72%) compared to rural Uganda (18%). Without gender-sensitive planning, rural women remain underserved.

7. Youth Unemployment

- High unemployment rates are the primary driver of youth migration from the Global South, creating severe ripple effects by critically limiting young people's access to modern energy (due to a lack of disposable income) and restricting their ability to contribute meaningfully to community development. A survey results highlight the top barriers to employment as lack of awareness about job opportunities (47.6%), a shortage of available entry-level positions (46.0%), and limited access to skills training (44.9%)².

COMPARATIVE INSIGHT:

Exclusion from energy access mirrors exclusion from energy policy. Addressing one without the other results in limited and unsustainable progress.

[1]-Gender and Youth in the Energy Transition: Reflections and Pathways from the SEforALL Global Forum: https://genderenergycompact.org/assets/2025/05/Header-websites_Final-19.png

[2]-How can youth in the Global South build careers in the clean energy transition? <https://www.newenergyx nexus.com/>

WOMEN AND YOUTH'S INCLUSION IN ENERGY DECISION-MAKING

1. Why Inclusion Matters

Women are active managers of household energy, not passive consumers. Policies that exclude their perspectives often fail. For example, several East African cookstove initiatives collapsed due to poor consideration of women's cooking habits. Youth are early adopters of technology, highly motivated entrepreneurs, and the future workforce of the clean energy sector. They bring innovative ideas and digital skills crucial for decentralized, off-grid solutions

2. Representation Gaps

- Women hold **less than 25% of decision-making positions** in Africa's energy sector.
- In Most of African and LAC countries, senior technical roles in the Ministries in charge of Energy remain male-dominated.

3. Benefits of Women's Participation

- **Inclusive Policies:** Reflect real community needs.
- **Innovation:** Boost technology design and adoption.
- **Social Impact:** Improve health, education, and livelihoods.
- **Accountability:** Promote transparency and good governance.

4. Pathways to Inclusion

- **Gender Mainstreaming:** Integrate gender in all energy frameworks and budgets.
- **Capacity Building:** Train women as technicians, entrepreneurs, and policy leaders (e.g., Barefoot College's solar engineer program).
- **Representation:** Enforce gender quotas and affirmative action in leadership and decision-making bodies.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with women-led enterprises and networks such as **ENERGIA**, which has supported over 4,000 female clean energy entrepreneurs.

COMPARATIVE INSIGHT:

Access without inclusion yields dependency; inclusion without access yields limited empowerment. Achieving both creates lasting impact and transformation.

CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES

- **Rwanda:** Gender mainstreaming in energy planning increased rural electrification and ensured household-level inclusion.
- **Kenya:** Women's cooperatives effectively distributed solar lanterns and cookstoves, reaching underserved rural households.
- **Senegal:** Accelerating the energy transition by providing solar mobile services to women farmers³
- **Vietnam:** Hydropower-Gender-informed Livelihood, Minority and Resettlement programmes³
- **Mozambique:** Solar Water Pumping for Drinking and Irrigation³

These cases demonstrate that **gender-inclusive energy strategies produce more equitable and sustainable outcomes.**

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integrate Gender in National Energy Policies** – Mandate gender-responsive budgeting and planning within all energy programs.
2. **Enhance Access to Finance for Women and youth Entrepreneurs** – Expand credit lines, guarantees, and training for women and youth in renewable energy value chains.
3. **Promote Education and Skills Development for women and youth**– Strengthen technical training and mentorship for women in clean energy innovation.
4. **Increase Female and youth Representation in Leadership** – Adopt quotas and mentorship programs for women in ministries, boards, and energy companies.
5. **Foster Public–Private Partnerships** – Support collaborations between governments, NGOs, and women-led enterprises for sustainable energy access.

CONCLUSION

Women and youth's empowerment in energy access and governance is a strategic pathway to achieving universal energy access and climate goals. Eliminating economic, social, and institutional barriers allows women to become equal partners in shaping Africa's energy future. By investing in education and training, we can empower the next generation to accelerate a more equitable clean energy transition

Empowering women and youth in energy is not only fair—it fuels progress, innovation, and resilience.

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The **Community of Practice (CoP)** serves as a collaborative platform to enhance capacities within the energy sector, driving a just and inclusive energy transition with a strong emphasis on gender equality. Bringing together diverse stakeholders, the CoP accelerates progress across nine countries in the Global South: Bolivia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Madagascar, Uganda, and Zambia, by strengthening the institutional role in capacity building and fostering effective South-South cooperation.

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