



Bujagali

A Hydropower Plant Supports Working Mothers to Retain More Women in its Workforce

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Access to Power and Renewable Energy as an Alternative Solution

Between 2010 and 2019, more than one billion people gained access to power globally but about 760 million people are still in the dark. About 640 million of these people live in rural areas—far from the electricity grid—and 570 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).¹ For millions of others in SSA, access to power remains unreliable or unaffordable.

Renewable energy is growing rapidly as an alternative solution in Africa. By 2040, renewable energy could account for more than 60 percent of new power generation in SSA, and this expected expansion will create new jobs.² In 2020, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) estimated that the RE sector employed 219,000 people in SSA, and about half of these jobs (110,000) were in the off-grid solar photovoltaic (PV) sector.³

Renewable Energy Sector – Tackling the Gender Gap through Family Friendly Policies

Despite the growth in the renewable energy sector, women are being left behind—they are lagging men in both leadership and technical jobs. This trend is a concern because a large body of evidence demonstrates that having women in leadership positions, and a gender-balanced workforce, positively correlates with a company's innovation, resilience, quality of services, reduced financial and reputational risk, and improved environmental standards.⁴ A company is gender balanced when it has between 40 and 60 percent of either gender at all levels of the organization.⁵ In sum, diverse companies are more competitive than their peers.

The gender gap can be explained by several challenges, including the lack of affordable and reliable childcare. In Sub-Saharan Africa, and across the globe, women bear most of the responsibility for childcare and household management. UN Women found that women carry out at least two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men.⁶ These duties can sometimes distract women from their paid work, and women frequently need to adapt their schedules to address the necessities of life. Companies that implement family-friendly policies to help women allocate their time for both paid and unpaid work, are better positioned to attract and retain female talent. These policies are also cost-effective in the long run, as employee turn-over is expensive. It can cost up to 20 percent of a worker's salary to replace them.⁷

Family-friendly policies are often confined to maternity leave, but the needs of parents extend beyond childbirth, and the business case for supporting parents is robust. There is ample evidence that companies that support parents with a suite of family-friendly policies, such as childcare and flexible work, perform better.⁸

IFC's Energy2Equal Initiative

In 2019, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), in partnership with the Government of Canada, launched the five-year [Energy2Equal](#) (E2E) program—the first Sub-Saharan African initiative to address gender gaps in the renewable energy sector.⁹

A key component of the initiative is a peer-learning-platform where 10 companies exchange best practices and implement gender-smart solutions that can help to improve business performance, foster innovation, attract more talent, and better engage with communities. This "E2E Company Insights," profile is part of a series of short studies that highlight successful gender equality approaches taken by companies participating in E2E to enhance their recruitment, retention, and promotion of women.

About Bujagali and the Gender Challenge

Bujagali Energy Limited owns and operates one of the largest hydropower plants in Uganda, with a capacity of 250 Megawatts of power. The plant opened in 2012 and generates about half of the energy supply in the country and exports renewable energy to neighboring countries. At the time of opening, the plant was expected to reduce carbon emissions by up to 900,000 tons per year, making it one of the largest Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects in Africa and in any Least Developed Country (LCD).¹⁰

In 2019, Bujagali joined [IFC's Energy2Equal \(E2E\)](#) peer-learning-platform to gain insights on how it could increase women's participation in the company's workforce and learn from global best practices. As part of the E2E program, Bujagali committed to undertake a workforce diagnostic, and develop a policy to address key barriers to women's advancement.

Gender-inclusive Retention Strategies: Supporting Mothers in the Workplace

In 2019, Bujagali had 12 full time employees, of which 5 were women and 7 were men, and 2 women held management positions. That year 40 percent of the company's women went on maternity leave, but none of them returned to work. This issue motivated the company to invest in supporting working parents. Bujagali's management realized that caring for young children often poses challenges for women, stalling their career advancement, and hampering the company's ability to recruit and retain women in its workforce.

The company strongly believes that it is important to promote gender equality through its non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity policies. Bujagali is also committed to developing a company culture that values and supports female workers and improving on its family-friendly policies. To achieve these results, Bujagali's human resources department collects sex-disaggregated data, and it is working to reinforce the company's policies related to maternity leave, child-care support, and flex-leave.

Results

Bujagali's family-friendly policies are helping it to attract more qualified women and improve their retention rates by solving a significant challenge for working mothers. In 2021, the company's workforce grew to 14 full time employees, and the share of women in its workforce increased from 27 percent in 2017, to 43 percent in 2021. Also, women now occupy 43 percent of Bujagali's managerial positions—including that of the Chief Financial Officer—and 5 women are among the 10 highest-paid employees.

In addition, in 2020, 20 percent of women took maternity leave, and 60 percent returned, a substantial improvement over 2019. With its new family friendly policies, Bujagali expects to increase its ability to attract, retain, and promote top female talent for years to come.

Looking ahead

In 2022, the company expects to invest in an on-site daycare facility so that parents can bring their children to work. This daycare is expected to improve employees' peace of mind and reduce their stress, which, in turn, should reduce absenteeism and staff turnover. Bujagali is also developing a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers, and it is formalizing arrangements to provide flex-work so that working mothers can leave the office at 3 p.m.

End Notes

- 1 IEA (International Energy Agency), IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency), UNSD (United Nations Statistics Division), World Bank, and WHO (World Health Organization). 2021. "Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report". Washington DC: World Bank. https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/data/files/download-documents/2021_tracking_sdg7_chapter_1_access_to_electricity.pdf.
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- 3 IRENA (International Renewable Energy Agency). "2020 Renewable Energy and Jobs – Annual Review 2020". Abu Dhabi: IRENA.
- 4 EY Canada (Ernest & Young). 2019. "Could gender equality be the innovation boost utilities need?" March 8, 2019. https://www.ey.com/en_ca/women-power-utilities/could-gender-equality-be-the-innovation-boost-utilities-need; Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Melinda Marshall, and Laura Serbin. 2013. "Innovation, Diversity and Market Growth". September 2018. New York: Center for Talent Innovation (now Coqual). https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/31_innovationdiversityandmarketgrowth_keyfindings-1.pdf; Ellyn Shook and Julie Sweet. 2019. "Equality = Innovation. Getting to Equal 2019: Creating a Culture that Drives Innovation". Toronto: Accenture. https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/thought-leadership-assets/pdf/accenture-equality-equals-innovation-gender-equality-research-report-iwd-2019.pdf; Alexandre Di Miceli and Angela Donaggio. 2018. "Women in Business Leadership Boost ESG Performance: Existing Body of Evidence Makes Compelling Case." IFC Corporate Knowledge Publication No. 42. Washington, DC: International Finance Corporation. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/ifc+cg/resources/private+sector+opinion/women+in+business+leadership+boost+esg+performance.
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- 8 ILO (International Labour Organization). 2014. "Maternity and Paternity at Work: Law and Practice Across the World". Geneva: ILO. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf
- 9 IFC (International Finance Corporation). n.d. "Energy2Equal: Empowering Women in Africa's Renewable Energy Sector". https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/energy2equal-africa
- 10 AKFED (Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development). 2012. "Clean, Sustainable Hydropower for Uganda". Geneva: Aga Khan Development Network. http://ipskenya.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2012_10_-_uganda_-_clean_sustainable_hydropower_for_uganda-min.pdf

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