



Daystar Power

Proven Strategies for Attracting More Women to Technical Roles in the Renewable Energy Sector

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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

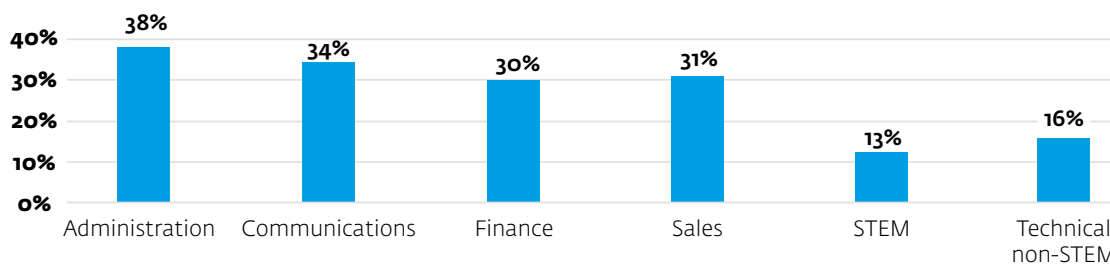
Renewable Energy Sector – Tackling the Gender Gap in STEM-related positions

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.

As the world continues to embrace cleaner sources of energy, it is critical to ensure that women are not excluded from the transition to green energy, and that they benefit from new opportunities as leaders, employees, and entrepreneurs in corporate supply chains.

Women in the energy sector face unique barriers to entry and promotion, particularly in STEM-related⁶ positions. An IFC study on the African energy workforce (forthcoming) showed that in Sub-Saharan Africa more than 30 percent of women working in renewable energy are working in support functions such as administration, communications, finance, and sales.⁷ In contrast, only 13 percent of STEM, and 16 percent of technical non-STEM positions, are occupied by women (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Women Employees, by Department (%)





Source: International Finance Corporation 2022.

Occupational segregation, which occurs when a specific demographic is underrepresented in certain roles or sectors, is attributed to legal barriers, as well as entrenched traditional norms and stereotypes that dictate which roles women can or cannot have.

The World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law database (2022)⁸ indicates that women in at least seven Sub-Saharan countries are barred from working in the energy sector "in the same way as a man" or from working at night as these jobs are deemed hazardous for women. Specifically, in Nigeria, women "are not allowed to work in industrial undertakings at night (World Bank 2021)."⁹ Further, IFC's forthcoming African energy workforce study found that traditional norms and gender stereotypes pose a significant barrier to women's entry and advancement in the sector—68 percent of women and 38 percent of men perceived barriers (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Perceptions of Barriers Facing Women and Men at Different Career Stages

	Entry-level	Career progression
Female respondents	 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social/cultural gender norms 2. Lack of diversity targets 3. Male-biased hiring practices 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Balancing work and family 2. Gender-based discrimination 3. Lack of mentoring opportunities
Male respondents	 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of STEM background 2. Lack of awareness of opportunities 3. Women's self-perception 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Women's self-perception 2. Lack of training opportunities 3. Lack of mentoring opportunities

Source: International Finance Corporation 2022.

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.¹⁰

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. “E2E Company Insights,” is a series of short studies that highlight successful gender equality approaches taken by participating companies to enhance the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women in the sector.

About Daystar Power Group

In 2017, Jasper Graf von Hardenberg and Christian Wessels founded [Daystar Power Group](#) (Daystar), a solar energy company that provides industrial consumers in West Africa with solutions to address the power crisis that African businesses face.

The company’s solar panel and battery storage installations offer affordable solutions for businesses and accelerate sustainable and green economic growth.

Daystar employs about 150 people (2022) in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo. Based on the conviction that women play a vital role in strengthening a company’s competitiveness, Daystar partnered with IFC in 2020, and committed to improving gender parity, particularly in STEM roles. By 2024, Daystar aims to increase the participation of women across all departments from 20 percent to 40 percent.

“Gender equality begins to drive itself. The more women are represented in leadership, the less one has to push for gender equality because it is visible.”

Jasper Graf von Hardenberg CEO



In 2019, Daystar 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, Daystar committed to undertake a holistic assessment of its company workplace policies to check for conscious or unconscious gender bias. It agreed to promote both a gender diverse culture, and train its mid-level leadership on how to improve gender diversity, catalyze internal change, and influence the sector by participating in a mentoring program and supporting women's greater representation in leadership roles and technical positions.

The Gender Challenge

Early on, Daystar identified a gender gap in its workforce, and especially in technical roles. In 2020, out of about 100 employees, only 25 percent were women. At the management level, the company was more gender balanced (42 percent women versus 57 percent men), which aligned with international standards.

Recruiting more women in technical positions was challenging, because few women applied for these positions, which made it difficult to develop a shortlist of candidates that had comparable numbers of men and women. Olufunke Taiwo, Daystar's Head of Human Resources explained, "For technical positions, we used to receive 3 applications from women for every 100 men." The lack of female applicants for technical roles is, in part, due to the small pipeline of women pursuing careers in STEM fields. In addition, of the women who graduate with STEM degrees, many doubt their capabilities, and they do not apply for positions in their field.

The Gender Strategy

Daystar's CEO, Jasper Graf von Hardenberg, understands the need to craft deliberate policies to increase women's participation at every level, including for technical positions that are usually held by men. Through IFC's Energy2Equal platform, Daystar has increased corporate knowledge and awareness about the business case for a gender-balanced workforce, improved its tactics for targeting women when recruiting for technical roles, and it now provides women with training and support after the company hires them in technical roles.

1. A Gender-inclusive Workforce: Raising Awareness of the Business Case

In October 2021, Daystar, in partnership with IFC, began addressing conscious and unconscious bias at the management level, and helping managers to change their views. IFC helped to review the company's gender policies, sex disaggregate workforce data and developed a customized training package to build the knowledge and awareness of the business case for investing in women. The company held two workshops for 18 senior managers (8 women and 10 men) titled: "The Business Case for Gender Diversity in Renewable Energy Companies – Building a Gender Equal Workplace". These workshops discussed the long-term benefits of a gender-balanced workforce, including greater profitability, more innovation, and better risk management.



Daystar has also established a program to help strengthen the technical knowledge of female recruits, and develop the soft skills they need to excel in company functions.

Along with educating managers about the strategic importance of gender equality in companies, the IFC training also discussed Daystar's gender gaps, and how to accelerate gender equality. Senior managers reviewed Daystar's sex-disaggregated data and trends, and compared this with industry data, which showed where the company was lagging—for example, in the representation of women on the company's board and in technical roles. The participants also learned about the barriers that women face, and best practices and strategies for addressing these.

During the workshops, the senior managers discussed ideas to address the existing gender gaps, proposed possible policies and practices to reduce these, and identified the steps needed to achieve gender equality.

2. Recruitment and Training Program for Women in Technical Roles

The results from the two workshops with IFC led to new talent management strategies for attracting, retaining, and developing the skills of women in technical functions. To recruit more women for core operational roles at an early stage in their career, the company created the *Women in Power Trainee Program*, which aims to attract a diverse group of young and brilliant engineering graduates to be developed into strong solar engineering industry leaders.

To attract potential candidates, the company conducts outreach programs with local universities, as well as through professional networking platforms, such as LinkedIn. In 2020, Daystar hired its first cohort of seven women.

To help these women find the best fit for their skills and career aspirations, Daystar gave them rotating assignments across the company—solar installation, sales engineering, field service engineering, and Network Operating Center (NOC) engineering.

The rotation program expands employee exposure to a range of company operations, giving them multiple vantage points, which makes them more valuable to the company. It also helps to develop their network of company relationships within the company which can enhance their ability to troubleshoot.

Daystar has also established a program to help strengthen the technical knowledge of female recruits, and develop the soft skills they need to excel in company functions. Through its mentoring program, Daystar pairs women trainees with senior technical leaders, which is an effective strategy for supporting the growth and advancement of these women.

The participants also learned about the barriers that women face, and best practices and strategies for addressing these.

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The importance of gender equality also prominently features on the [company's website](#),¹⁰ which explicitly states that it is hiring and training women who have recently graduated from university in technical and engineering roles.

The journey of women engineers in the renewable energy (RE) sector has not been easy. As Adaoma Onyeukwu, a Daystar project engineer explains, "In the past, when I was looking for internships, I met the requirements, but I was denied opportunities because I was a woman. Some recruiters expressly cited my gender as the reason why I was not hired. It was very discouraging. But Daystar was different. It was as if they said, 'We want you to do this job, particularly because you are a woman. We want to help you and empower you.'"

Daystar's approach is helping the company to hire more women, and equally as important, it is giving women the tools to succeed at Daystar and beyond. Miracle Adogamhe, a sales engineer explained, "A former employer would not train me or teach me the technical skills I should have gained through the position, and it was demoralizing."

Along with providing women trainees with the technical skills they need to succeed in the company, Daystar's Women in Power Trainee Program is designed to give trainees practical experience that empowers them in their positions. Adaoma Onyeukwu added, "I appreciate the diversity of skills I developed in the program, including business etiquette, communication skills, client-facing interaction, and teamwork."

Results and Looking Ahead

Since 2019, Daystar has recruited 25 women into key roles, including the CEO for the West Africa region, the Chief Operating Officer, and engineers. Educating senior managers was an essential first step to begin transforming the workplace. A robust diagnosis of the gender gap, coupled with a time-bound action plan to hire and retain women in non-traditional roles has helped to sensitize senior managers to the benefits that gender brings to enhancing corporate competitiveness. Challenges still abound, but between 2019 and 2021, the number of women in technical positions increased from 4 to 9, and in 2021 alone, the company added 5 more women.

Daystar's inclusion of women in technical roles is having a ripple effect outside the company, as well. As clients see more women in technical roles, they are recognizing the steps the company has taken. As Abisola Tedimola explains, "Initially clients could be skeptical when a woman was working on-site, but that quickly changed to appreciation for Daystar hiring skilled technical engineers."

In 2022, Daystar intends to continue hiring more women, it has already enlisted nine "Women in Power" trainees, and it intends to train another cohort of women in the second quarter of 2022.

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End Notes

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