



# ENGIE PowerCorner

Promoting Women's Representation in Leadership Positions

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH  
**Canada**

**Energy2Equal**  
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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).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

## Renewable Energy Sector – Addressing the Gender Gap in Leadership Positions

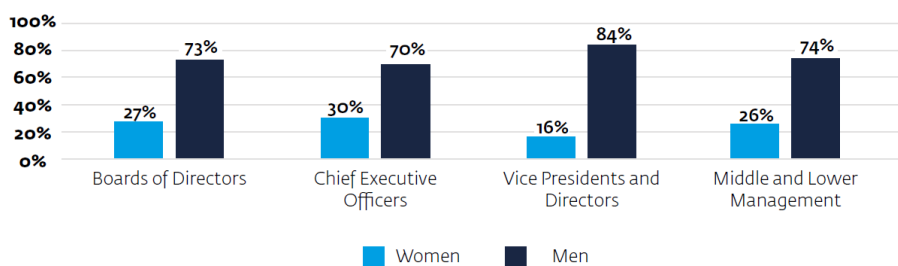
Despite the growth in the renewable energy sector, women are being left behind—they are lagging men in both leadership and technical jobs. This trend is a concern because a large body of evidence demonstrates that having women in leadership positions, and a gender-balanced workforce, positively correlates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

A 2022 IFC study found that in the renewable energy (RE) sector in Sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise 27 percent of board members (Figure 1), which indicates a trend toward greater gender parity.<sup>6</sup> This figure (27 percent) is higher than the African average (18 percent), and the G20 average (20 percent).<sup>7,8</sup>

Among corporate leaders, women comprise about one third of CEO's; however, at the Vice President and Director level, women comprise only 16 percent, which indicates a persistent gender gap at the highest levels of decision-making.

More women are needed at the managerial level (at least 25 percent) to feed the pipeline at the Vice President and Director level. A company is gender balanced when it has between 40 and 60 percent of either gender at all levels of the organization,<sup>9</sup> and company culture and policies play an important role in creating a gender-balanced company.

**Figure 1: Women in Leadership Positions**



Source: International Finance Corporation 2022.

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.

## 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.<sup>19</sup>

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 ENGIE PowerCorner

[ENGIE PowerCorner](#), is part of [ENGIE Energy Access](#),<sup>11</sup> a subsidiary of the French multinational utility, ENGIE, which provides low-carbon energy and services through its 170,000 employees. ENGIE PowerCorner is a solar power mini-grid company that services rural Sub-Saharan African communities that are not connected to the power-grid. The company builds mini-grid power generation stations out of solar panels and shipping containers, and it generates and stores enough renewable energy on-site to supply entire villages with affordable, clean, quiet power, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also provides villagers with a power ecosystem that can include WiFi for access to the internet, and energy-efficient lightbulbs, and appliances. The company's "one-stop-shop" strategy is providing life-changing solutions for homes, schools, health clinics, and small businesses in remote locations.

## ENGIE PowerCorner's Gender Strategy

In 2019, under IFC's [Energy2Equal](#) initiative, ENGIE PowerCorner committed to increase female representation in management positions from 20 percent in 2019 to 40 percent by 2021. Having achieved that goal, ENGIE set a new target to achieve 50 percent by 2030. Further, it established targets to increase the number of women in the workforce from 35 percent to 40 percent by 2022. As part of its multi-country expansion phase, four women were appointed to Head of Mini-grid positions in Benin, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia. IFC gathered insights from all four of these women—Cecilia Manu (Tanzania), Mutanuka Mukabanji (Zambia), Laurence Keke (Benin), and Onyinye Anene-Nzelu (Nigeria), —regarding company strategies to diversify management.



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## A Conversation with Engie's Cecilia Manu, Head of Mini-grids, Tanzania

Cecilia Manu is the head of mini grid activities for ENGIE PowerCorner in Tanzania. Prior to joining the company in 2016, for more than a decade, she worked for non-governmental organizations and social enterprises, facilitating access to solar power. She joined ENGIE PowerCorner, initially, as a Business Development Officer and was promoted to Business Development Manager, and then to Business Development and Commercial Manager. In March 2022, Manu was one of 10 women in the energy sector who were recognized by [The Citizen newspaper's "Rising Women Initiative,"](#) for their impact.<sup>12</sup> The aim of the initiative is to promote the women's empowerment agenda by identifying and profiling women in managerial positions in different industries and sectors across Tanzania.

*What challenges did you encounter as a woman working in the renewable energy sector?*

When I started working in the sector, applicants from villages were mostly men, and it was very difficult. I experienced some stereotypes about gender roles. A former colleague thought that I could not manage because of the technical skills required to succeed, some of which may not be of interest to women. There was a general sense that "this is for men" because men are better suited for technical skills, such as engineering, handling electricity, field work, and the physical activities required, such as the climbing. There is a perception that this is too risky for women.

*How is ENGIE PowerCorner addressing these issues?*

As part of the core values of the company, ENGIE PowerCorner created a culture where every employee is encouraged to be creative, take risks, and take responsibility for their decisions. While women sometimes have a fear of failure, women need to learn to make hard decisions, face the consequences, and reassess if needed. At ENGIE PowerCorner, there is solid collaboration between male and female co-workers, making this process easier.

In addition, the company has provided gender-inclusive training for all staff and explained how hiring more women increases company productivity. There are women role models, too. For instance, the Engie (parent company) CEO is female. Further, the company is supporting the recruitment of women for every position, in part, by encouraging women to apply to job openings. They link this directly with team spirit, creativity, innovation, and productivity. As a result, all four country heads of the mini grids are now women.

*What advice would you give to women who want to build a career in renewable energy?*

To build a career in renewable energy, women need to develop an understanding of the sector and what they need to deliver. My main advice to women is to be confident. Getting experience with renewable energy platforms, attending conferences, and public speaking can help to build confidence. Taking pride in our abilities and knowledge can empower us. In the past, I was hesitant to participate in discussions, but then I realized that I knew as much as my male peers. Taking risks in speaking up, and having my comments be taken into consideration, gave me the confidence to move forward.

My academic background was not in renewable energy, so I took short courses to better understand the sector, and that enabled me to go the extra mile. Mentorship is also an efficient way of supporting women's career advancement. I joined several forums related to women in leadership and renewable energy, including the forum of IFC and the Global Women's Network for the Energy Transition—[Women in Renewable Energy in Africa \(W-REA\)](#)<sup>13</sup> that are related to women in leadership and renewable energy. Having role models inside the sector and understanding their career path demonstrated to me that reaching leadership positions is achievable.

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**Cecilia Manu**  
Head of Mini-grids, Tanzania

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## A Conversation with Engie's Mutanuka Mukabanji, Head of Mini-grids, Zambia

In 2019, Mutanuka Mukabanji joined ENGIE PowerCorner as Head of Mini-grids in Zambia. Prior to this, Mukabanji worked for Power Africa, where she was responsible for the Offgrid Challenge, and for assisting companies in accessing financing from the United States African Development Foundation (USADF).

She was an operations director at Smart Village, which provides services to local and international investors, as well as agencies with an interest in renewable energy, energy access, and sustainable development in Zambia.

Along with her job at ENGIE PowerCorner, Mukabanji is an administrator for the Association of Power Companies, a lobbying platform working toward creating policies and an enabling environment for energy access, and she is pursuing her master's degree in renewable energy at the Africa Research University.

### *As a female manager at ENGIE PowerCorner, what challenges do you face?*

Challenges related to my gender tend to arise in interactions with men from competing companies, where gender biases still exist toward women in technical sectors, and interactions can remain patriarchal in Africa. These men sometimes do not take women seriously, they refrain from asking very technical questions, and they have a bias that you will not deliver. As a result, women have to work twice as hard to prove a point, and show that we can get results.

ENGIE PowerCorner has successfully created a culture where diversity is viewed as a strength. Thanks to this, male co-workers are always very supportive, and provide me with the assistance needed to succeed in my position.

### *What specific steps did ENGIE PowerCorner take to hire and promote more women in leadership positions?*

ENGIE PowerCorner was very intentional with its gender policy and set a target of 50 percent gender parity in leadership positions by 2030. We have adapted our strategies for both recruiting and retaining talent. On the hiring side, each posting explicitly specifies that women are strongly encouraged to apply. Nevertheless, it is challenging to get women to apply to technical positions. STEM careers are often looked at as a male career path. I found that hiring women earlier in their careers and developing their potential is a solution to counter the lack of female applicants for senior positions.

ENGIE PowerCorner is committed to growing the talent already retained, and has mentoring and training programs in place. These programs maximize our available workforce resources and create a clear career path for women.

### *As a manager at ENGIE PowerCorner, what benefits do you see in having more women in the renewable energy sector?*

Having women working on an ENGIE PowerCorner clean electric cooking project in Zambia, which was supported by IFC's Energy2Equal initiative, helped improve the quality of the data we gathered from women villagers. We quickly realized that the quality of data varied, depending on the gender of the surveyor, and that the soft skills that women possess such as communication, critical thinking, and problem solving were essential for getting the data that we needed.

In addition, when I go into communities, I am a leader, and I serve as a role model for girls and young women. My role exposes them to possible career paths in a sector that adds value to rural livelihoods and encourages them to consider STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) educational programs.

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**Mutanuka Mukabanji**  
Head of Mini-grids, Zambia

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## A Conversation with Engie's Laurence Keke, Head of Mini-grids, Benin

Laurence Keke joined ENGIE PowerCorner, in 2019, initially as a Mini Grid Development Officer in Paris, France. She was promoted to Head of Mini-grids for ENGIE PowerCorner in Benin that same year.

Keke had 15 years of experience in industry, working for Renault and Areva, before transitioning to the renewable energy sector in 2018, when she joined Terre Solaire, a French company specializing in solar photovoltaic installations. She holds a doctorate (PhD) in computer science from Université of Clermont-Ferrand, France, and a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the EM Lyon Business School, France.

*Did you experience some challenges being a female manager in the renewable energy sector?*

When I started my career as an engineer in the industry, there were very few women occupying these positions, but when I began working in the renewable energy sector, companies were already more feminized, and women held positions such as business managers. ENGIE PowerCorner's corporate culture is very open toward women, and I never felt illegitimate. However, externally, partners can be surprised to meet a woman in a managing position who is tackling technical issues, especially in Africa.

*As a woman in a leadership role in the renewable energy sector, what steps should companies in the industry take to increase the number of women leaders?*

To attract more women, it is vital to showcase role models. The current and former CEOs of ENGIE Group are women. Having women in prominent leadership roles inspires young women to pursue careers in this sector. Nevertheless, it has been difficult to attract women for certain positions, especially technical roles. Managers need to be proactive. When I took the position of Head of Mini-grids for ENGIE PowerCorner in Benin, I actively recruited technical and commercial managers, and worked with human resources to push women's applications forward.

Once women are hired, it is essential to provide them with the support they need to succeed and advance their careers. Women can be more modest than men in the workplace, which hides their capabilities and reduces recognition. Providing women with training and mentoring is necessary to make them more daring, and ensure that managers understand their willingness to progress and move toward new challenges.

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**Laurence Keke**  
Head of Mini-grids, Benin

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## A Conversation with Engie's Onyinye Anene-Nzelu, Head of Mini-grids, Nigeria

Onyinye Anene-Nzelu joined ENGIE PowerCorner, in 2020, as Head of Mini-grids for ENGIE PowerCorner in Nigeria. Prior to joining the company, Anene-Nzelu held positions in the renewable energy sector such as field and commercial engineer in Nigeria and South Sudan. She has also been a consultant in the energy sector, specializing in policy, market structures, and financing.

### *What challenges do women face in advancing their careers in renewable energy companies?*

While ENGIE PowerCorner is actively ensuring that women are integrated at every company level, this can be a challenge for certain positions. For instance, I am about to drive for six hours for a multi-day field visit in rural Nigeria.

This type of work can be seen as not suitable for women, and can turn off women from pursuing and advancing their careers. Also, when I was starting out as a young field engineer, I sometimes had to fight to make my voice heard.

ENGIE PowerCorner has a very different culture that makes it more straightforward for women to advance their careers in this sector. Nevertheless, I still encounter difficulties in hiring women in Nigeria. When I joined ENGIE PowerCorner, my team consisted of two men, and I wanted to recruit two women. Despite extending the application deadline, and mentioning that women were highly encouraged to apply, no women sent their applications; however, I was able to hire female interns. I intend to grow the pipeline of female talent so that I can offer permanent positions in the future.

### *What steps can help tackle these issues?*

Companies need to be very deliberate in supporting women. Some small steps, such as ensuring that changing rooms for women are in place, go a long way in retaining female talent. I had to change in my car to go into the field. Mentoring is also an efficient way of building women's confidence in the workplace. Women are often the last ones to speak during meetings, and it is essential to ensure that managers leave a door open to hear women's thoughts and monitor how they are progressing. Somebody always left a door open to hear my views, and helped me to see how well I was progressing. I could craft a plan based on my career objectives and see the next steps I needed to take to get there.

At ENGIE PowerCorner, women benefit from specific policies that facilitate their progress. The company's internal communication about gender targets is clear and robust. Also, progress toward gender parity is shared at all company levels, which increases managers' accountability, and contributes to the company's inclusive culture. There are other policies, too, that help retain women, such as maternity leave, which at ENGIE PowerCorner is longer than the legal requirements in Nigeria.

### *What strategies do you put in place to increase the opportunities provided to women in ENGIE PowerCorner in Nigeria?*

I ensure that the language in the vacancy announcement is gender-neutral when hiring more team members. When possible, I try to include a picture of a woman, or I include my picture as the mini grid head. I want to ensure that it is clear to applicants that the position is open to women. I hope that this inspires females in the recruitment process, and sends the message that they are welcome to be a part of the team. Targeting women early in their careers is influential, and makes it easier for managers to attract female talent.

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The progress towards gender parity is shared at all company levels, which increases managers' accountability and the company's overall culture."



**Onyinye Anene-Nzelu**  
Head of Mini-grids, Nigeria

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## End Notes

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