



## Mainstreaming Gender in the SADC Energy Sector

### Introduction

Without access to modern energy services, women and girls spend most of their time on basic tasks that are time-consuming, non-remunerative and highly laborious, such as collecting biomass fuels. This further exacerbates gender inequalities as many women are unable to access wage employment, education or business opportunities due to these responsibilities, and also limits options for social and political interaction outside the household.

Women and girls are largely responsible for household and community activities, including energy provision in most Member States of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and thus are the primary energy producers and end users at household level. Major challenges within the gender and energy nexus are the limited participation of women in designing home energy systems, resource access, and decision-making at national and regional levels. The regional trend at the critical decision-making level is more inclined towards men, with women occupying less than 10 percent of most governance structures in this regard.

The major energy source in SADC is traditional fuels such as firewood and animal and crop residue, which accounts for 74 percent of energy requirements for cooking, crop drying and brick making in rural communities (SARDC et al, 2012). Women in urban areas have also been affected by the demand-side electricity management policies such as load shedding. These measures have had negative impacts on family activities and on business.

### Accessibility and Social Dimensions

Women are disproportionately affected by challenges associated with access to modern sources of energy compared to men. This has affected development processes including energy as sustainable development cannot be achieved without full and equal rights for half of the population, both in law and practice. There is need for the region to develop mechanisms focused on addressing inequalities in the energy sector as well as to expand the role of women in developing as well as implementing energy solutions.

Energy production, procurement, transportation and distribution further perpetuates gender imbalances, especially for women living in rural areas. The primary source of energy for rural people in most SADC Member States is biomass which may be sourced more than five kilometres away from homesteads. This has a negative impact on women, not only in travelling long distances on foot but women normally carry heavy loads of firewood on their heads, which can compromise physical health and wellbeing. In some situations where collecting firewood is restricted through formal regulations, women are more vulnerable to sexual harassment or fines for illegal firewood collection.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has estimated that illnesses from indoor pollution result in more deaths of women and children annually than HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and malnutrition combined (IISD,

2013). The physical safety of women is compromised as violent crimes can also be perpetrated even in daylight where resources are scarce and women are obliged to collect fuel from remote and isolated areas (ENERGIA/DfID, 2006).

### Existing Legal and Policy Framework

Energy has been recognized globally as the missing Millennium Development Goal but is included as one of the targets/indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At regional level, the SADC Treaty seeks gender parity and SADC's development blueprint, the RISDP, identifies gender and energy as a critical area of regional development and integration.

The existing SADC energy policy framework is comprehensive and places emphasis on the availability of sufficient, reliable and least costly energy services. This addresses the broader SADC objectives, which include investment attraction and promoting competitiveness and trade as a means for eradicating poverty, aligned with the environmentally sustainable use of energy resources. The main policy instruments concerning energy in the SADC region are:

- SADC Protocol on Energy (1998),
- SADC Energy Cooperation Policy and Strategy (1996),
- SADC Energy Action Plan (1997) and (2000),
- SADC Regional Energy Access Strategy and Action Plan (2010).

The Protocol acknowledges the important roles of women and men in implementation of energy programmes and urges Member States to "ensure that the development and use of energy takes cognisance of the gender realities of the region".

Under Guidelines for Cooperation, the Protocol also recognises that the gender dimension is one of the key socio-economic issues that the region's energy policy should address. This is in addition to the SADC Protocol on Gender Development and the SADC Treaty that directly seek to facilitate the empowerment of women and positively influence gender-balanced interests.

The promotion of community participation in policy formulation and implementation with special attention on the gender dimension is highlighted in the SADC Energy Protocol. Other issues are energy trade; integrated resource planning; energy efficiency and conservation; demand-side management; energy pricing; private sector and non-governmental organisation involvement; energy competition; training and capacity building; investment and funding; and the environment. The policy framework is supportive and responsive to SADC's strategic priorities that are targeted to industrialisation, the promotion of economic and social infrastructure, agriculture, human resources development, gender mainstreaming and improvement of social welfare.

Energy plays a pivotal role in the development agenda of any region, the SADC region included. Access to affordable, reliable and modern energy is critical in addressing development challenges such as poverty, gender inequalities and food security.



## Key Goals and Targets in Energy and Gender

### UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Targets to 2030

- End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing at all ages
- Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls
- Ensure access to sustainable modern energy
- Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work
- Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Make human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

### African Union Agenda 2063

- Inclusive growth and sustainable development
- Access to affordable and decent energy
- Capable institutions and transformative leadership
- People-driven development, relying on the potential of African people, especially women and youth
- All citizens of Africa actively involved in decision-making
- Full gender parity, with women occupying at least 50 percent of elected public office at all levels and half of managerial positions in the public and the private sectors.

### Revised SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) to 2020

- Increased access and affordability for infrastructure and services
- Electricity generation and transmission expansion plan implemented
- Gender mainstreaming capacity in the region developed and strengthened
- SADC Progress monitored towards the achievement of gender parity at all levels
- At least 50 percent women in decision-making positions in the public sector by 2015, or affirmative action in place to accelerate the attainment of this target.

Adapted from UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015), African Union Commission (2015) and SADC (2015)

### Energy Access and Capacity – Selected Indicators

- 290 million of 915 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa have access to energy and the number of people without access is rising.
- At least 25 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are in a state of power crisis.
- Only 5 percent of rural areas in the SADC region have access to electricity.
- SADC has experienced electricity shortage since 2007.
- SADC has experienced an upwards trend in renewable capacity of 26% between 2000-2014.
- Renewables currently account for 23.5% of total generation capacity in SADC.

Adapted from UNDP (2012), SADC (2012), REN21 et al (2015)

### Gender Composition of Energy Sector Governance in SADC

|  | Men | Women | Total           |
|--|-----|-------|-----------------|
| Ministers responsible for energy   | 13  | 2     | 15              |
| Heads of power utilities   | 15  | 0     | 15              |
| Heads of regulatory institutions   | 10  | 2     | 12 <sup>a</sup> |
| Heads of regional power organizations (SAPP <sup>b</sup> and RERA <sup>c</sup> ) | 2   | 0     | 2               |

#### Author compilation

<sup>a</sup> Of the 15 SADC Member States, Angola, Malawi and the United Republic of Tanzania are without energy/electricity regulators. <sup>b</sup> The Southern African Power Pool (SAPP) was established in 1995 to coordinate the planning, generation, transmission and marketing of electricity on behalf of the 12 interconnected SADC Member State utilities. <sup>c</sup> The Regional Electricity Regulators Association of Southern Africa (RERA) was established in 2002 to facilitate the harmonization of regulatory policies, legislation, standards and practices and to be a platform for effective cooperation among energy regulators within the SADC region. 10 of the 12 countries with energy/electricity regulators are members of RERA.



## Challenges with Policy Framework

While the SADC energy sector policy framework is quite comprehensive and addresses the broader regional objectives and strategic priorities, the programmes fall short of the stated regional objectives. Gender inequalities in decision-making positions in the energy sector across southern Africa make it reasonable to conclude that the present structures and processes within the sector have not addressed the inequalities and subsequently energy-related challenges faced by women.

The regional policy framework aims to address challenges in the energy sector but its successes depend on the implementing agents such as power utilities in Member States and regional energy institutions. The current status suggests that the region has not been improving the structure of governance in the energy sector.

One of the targets set by the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development which was adopted in 2008 but was ratified and entered into force only in 2013, is that by 2015 the region should have reached 50/50 gender representation in decision-making positions. This target has not been reached in the top leadership in energy institutions at national and regional levels. See Table on page 2.

## Selected Experiences of SADC Member States

Member States have undertaken a number of initiatives to promote gender equality in the energy sector, with varying outcomes. One such initiative was a gender audit of the Botswana energy sector undertaken by the Botswana Technology Centre (BTC) in consultation with the Energy Affairs Division of the Ministry of Minerals, Energy and Water Resources and other stakeholders (UNDP, 2012; Wright et al, 2009). The results of the audit showed that, although there is a common understanding of the different roles of women and men in Botswana, the knowledge of the relationship between gender, energy and poverty was still limited. This indicates that existing energy policies and programmes are gender blind, which means they do not address gender disparities. Women are often excluded from consultations during the development of energy policies and programmes.

Based on the outcome of the audit and subsequent training initiatives, awareness about the importance of the gender-energy nexus has increased within the Botswana government and the Botswana Power Corporation (BPC). BPC recently started a gender mainstreaming programme for rural electrification. The audit also led to a pilot project for collecting gender-disaggregated data and strengthening gender expertise in the country's energy sector.

To promote the participation of women in the energy sector, Zimbabwe established the Gender and Energy Network of Zimbabwe, an initiative to engender energy access issues and empower women on issues of energy. Chaired by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development and the Ministry of Energy and Power Development, the network seeks to achieve the goals through raising awareness on the relationship between gender and energy, and advocating for policy reforms.

Zambia has made progress on sensitising gender issues in the energy sector. The Revised National Energy Policy (RNEP) promised to provide more gender balance in the sector's "energy planning, management and utilisation to ease burden of poverty on all vulnerable groups especially women at household, community and national level" (RNEP, 2008).

The country has also undertaken a critical gender analysis through the Ministry of Mines, Energy and Water Development which culminated in the Zambia Gender and Energy Mainstreaming Strategy (2011-2013). The Zambia Electricity Supply

Corporation Limited (ZESCO) is implementing the Increased Access to Electricity Service (IAES) Project which has enabled women to play a more effective role as economic agents using rights-based development approaches that focus on increasing the economic opportunities of women and the freedom to work in security and dignity (ESMAP, 2014).

## The Case for Mainstreaming Gender in Energy

*"Gender mainstreaming is much more than a women's issue; it is the basis for establishing a level of equality between women and men that can help stimulate economic growth, create higher-level jobs, support communities, raise productivity and reduce poverty." UNIDO (2014)*

Mainstreaming gender in the energy sector means creating space for equal opportunities for women and men to reach full potential and contribute towards the sustainable development of the energy sector.

Increasing participation by women should be a top priority for reforming the energy sector. Increasing the number of women in decision-making positions can extend gender context sensitivity in finding solutions to problems affecting the sector. The energy sector is dominated by men in decision-making positions and has done little to address challenges faced by women.

Efforts to mainstream gender in the energy sector can have many other benefits. Many women have limited access to modern sources of energy yet this can be addressed by increasing the uptake of renewable energies, which in most cases are locally sourced. This can result in improved standards of living and economic empowerment, as well as expanding opportunities through promoting alternative renewable energy resources, particularly to those groups with little access to modern grid-based energy.

Women play a critical role in energy provision and consumption within households and possess valuable knowledge relevant to sustainable energy solutions. Women can draw on the natural circles of family, friends and community for customers, which has proved to be an effective way of distributing renewable energy technologies to rural households. Thus, renewable energy projects can enhance the economic autonomy and social status of women, including an earned income and opportunities to participate in and drive sustainable development of communities (UNIDO, 2014).

As women bear the burden of manual work of gathering firewood in most parts of southern Africa, the focus on initiatives aimed at improving institutional structures is a case for improving the development of the region.

## Way Forward

Gender equality is one of the critical pathways for a successful transition to sustainable energy for all by 2030 (UN DESA, 2015). There is need to scale-up efforts to promote inclusive energy policy planning and implementation. Barriers, such as lack of training and education, and social norms that view modern energy technology businesses as "work for men" limit the opportunities for women to engage in sustainable energy entrepreneurship.

Policy makers and other stakeholders should work together to develop policies and programmes that address the gender-energy-development paradigm and expand the role of women in developing and implementing energy solutions. Thus women as the major end-users in the household can buy into reformed energy services forged through equal partnership collaboration with men in line with gender parity goals.

There is need to mainstream gender in energy programming and policy, not just to ensure that these are good social interventions but to promote efficiency. Incorporating gender perspectives into energy projects, policy and planning is critical in ensuring the effectiveness of all development activities that involve energy use.

As women are the primary energy end-users in households and communities in most SADC countries, involving women in the various steps of the energy value chain can expand both the scale and quality of sustainable energy initiatives. Involving women in the design of sustainable energy solutions can help to ensure that interventions are tailored to meet the needs of women as well as men. Involving women in the distribution and marketing of renewable energy technologies and products can help to encourage the use of these services by providing other women with comfortable spaces within which to learn about technologies and discuss particular concerns.

There is also need to promote access to cheap, renewable energy technologies across southern Africa to ensure easy availability to all. This would require adopting programmes to provide incentives to the private sector and research institutions to produce basic technologies that can be accessed more cheaply by the majority of the people in the region. Although there is cost-saving over time, the solar home systems are not cheap to install; a typical home system in the region is cited by Madamombe (2015) to cost between US\$500 and US\$1,000. Greater effort could be put into involving women in the design and production of locally appropriate energy technologies to encourage more investment in renewable energy.

The use of innovative financing schemes, such as fee-for-service arrangements, is one way to overcome these high up-front costs. Installing solar panels to power multiple houses at once can also cut down on costs. Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia have developed solar markets, in many cases with special funds to support consumer credit.

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## Policy Considerations

SADC Member States should:

- Develop and strengthen energy policies that focus on improving rural and peri-urban energy systems in order to reduce the workload women have in sourcing biomass;
- Target increasing the number of women in decision-making positions and actively engage women in problem-solving processes;
- Enhance the development and utilisation of modern renewable energy sources and technologies;
- Increase energy education and build gender-balanced capacity in energy planning, implementation and monitoring;
- Establish efficient energy production, procurement, transportation, distribution and end-user systems in an environmentally sound manner and with due regard to gender issues;
- Reform the energy sector and facilitate investment and expansion of services to promote adoption of more efficient and sustainable use of biomass;
- Mainstream gender in all energy programmes at the national and regional levels.

## Conclusion

Addressing gender-related challenges in the energy sector is key in addressing the energy poverty that southern Africa is currently facing, hence the gender issues should also be prioritised in the sectoral development discourse and programmes. Mainstreaming gender in energy should be supported by appropriate policies and structures that take into account gender realities in southern Africa. Policy formulation and strengthening the existing policies is essential with consultations from women and men so that all have equal opportunities to sustainably contribute to the development of the region.

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