



30 Years of Gender & Sustainable Energy Leadership

ENERGIA: International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy

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Acronyms

ABPP	Africa Biogas Partnership Program	GGCA	Global Gender and Climate Alliance
ADB	Asian Development Bank	GTF	Global Tracking Framework
AfDB	African Development Bank	GWNET	Global Women's Network for the Energy Transition
CIF	Climate Investment Funds	HEPA	Health and Energy Platform of Action
COP	Conference of the Parties	HLPF	United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
CSD	(United Nations) Commission on Sustainable Development	IEA	International Energy Agency
DFID	(UK) Department for International Development	IIASA	International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development	IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
DGIS	Directorate-General for International Cooperation	ILO	International Labor Organization
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States	IRENA	International Renewable Energy Agency
ECREEE	ECOWAS Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency	IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
EnDev	Energizing Development	JFPR	Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction
EPRA	Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (Kenya)	KaR	Knowledge and Research (program)
ESMAP	Energy Sector Management Assistance Program	KenGen	Kenya Electricity Generating Company
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	KNEB	Kenya Nuclear Electricity Board
GACC	Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves	KPLC	Kenya Power and Lighting Company
GENES	Red Mesoamericana de Género en Energía Sostenible	LPG	Liquefied petroleum gas
GESI	Gender and Social Inclusion	MCA	Millennium Challenge Account

MDG	Millennium Development Goal	SEforALL	Sustainable Energy for ALL
NEA	Nepal Electricity Authority	Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
NFP	National Focal Point		
NGO	Non-governmental organization	STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation	TA	Technical assistance
NREL	National Renewable Energy Laboratory	TAG	Technical Advisory Group
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	TIE-ENERGIA	Turning Information into Empowerment: Strengthening Gender and Energy Networking in Africa
PUE	Productive use of energy		
REFAN	Réseau des Agricultures du Nord	UN	United Nations
REREC	Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Corporation (Kenya)	UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
RNFRS	Réseau National des Femmes Rurales du Sénégal	UNDP	United Nations Development Program
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
SACREEE	Southern African Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
SAGA	Semi-Autonomous Government Agency (Kenya)	UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal	UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
SE4ALL	Sustainable Energy for All (former name of SEforALL)	UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
SEAR	State of Electricity Access Report	VSLA	Village savings and loan association
SEE-CLEAN	Strengthening the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for Clean Cooking (program)	WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
SEED	Sustainable Energy and Environment Division (UNDP)	WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
		WHO	World Health Organization
		WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

Executive Summary

Introduction

ENERGIA was founded in 1996 to fill a critical gap surrounding the gender-energy nexus, which emerged as an urgent area for action following the Beijing and Rio conferences. In 30 years, ENERGIA has grown into a global network spanning 26 countries with 140+ partners. Starting from a small awareness-raising newsletter, ENERGIA has evolved into a global authority on gender, sustainable energy, and climate justice. It has shaped national policies, regional frameworks, and global agendas, while empowering millions of women as energy users, leaders, and entrepreneurs.

Why ENERGIA matters today

The gender and energy landscape is rapidly transforming. Digitalization, climate pressures, and shifting labor markets are redefining who participates in and benefits from energy systems. Yet gaps persist. By 2030, 896 million women may still lack clean cooking access, and 321 million may lack electricity, a gap concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. Climate change disproportionately burdens women, increasing unpaid care work and deepening vulnerabilities. Women make up 80% of those displaced by climate change. Climate shocks also increase women's unpaid care work by 20-40% and women represent only 16% of the global energy workforce. Critically, SDG 7 remains one of the few development goals without a gender-specific indicator. In this context, ENERGIA's mission "to place women at the center of energy transitions" is more urgent and relevant than ever.

A global leader shaping policy and practice

ENERGIA has been instrumental in embedding gender into global energy frameworks. It cochairs the SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group, has influenced the inclusion of clean cooking as SDG 7.1.2, and coleads the Gender and Energy Compact, now backed by 100+ institutions. Its evidence and advocacy have shaped major initiatives including the Global Tracking Framework, the Health and Energy Platform of Action (HEPA), and regional policies such as the ECOWAS Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access.

The ENERGIA Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) program has achieved the following in delivering impact at scale, shaping global policy, the Gender & Energy Compact, and shaping country and regional transformations.

Impact at scale

- Supporting 19,000+ women energy entrepreneurs who have collectively reached 9 million last-mile consumers with clean energy solutions across Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Nepal.
- 91% of the women entrepreneurs report higher business revenues, as each enterprise creates work for an average of four additional people.
- 90% also report improved quality of life.
- The women-led enterprises consistently achieve higher customer satisfaction scores than conventional distribution models.

These results confirm ENERGIA's long-held conviction that women aren't just victims of energy poverty but active agents of change and driving energy access solutions.

Shaping global policy

- Helping secure clean cooking as SDG Target 7.1.2, alongside WHO, the World Bank, and IIASA, embedding gender in the global energy framework.
- Co-chairing the SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group at the UN High-Level Political Forum, providing authoritative technical guidance on gender-inclusive energy monitoring.
- Embedding gender in UNFCCC climate outcomes, starting with the Cancún Agreements (COP16), marking the first formal integration of gender into UNFCCC texts.
- Contributing to gender indicators across SDGs 3, 5, and 7, including household air pollution and unpaid domestic work.

The Gender and Energy Compact

- Launching the Compact at the 2021 UN High-Level Dialogue on Energy, which has mobilized 100+ governments, organizations, and companies to make concrete, time-bound commitments on gender equality in energy, coordinated by ENERGIA alongside GWNET, UNIDO, and SEforALL.

Country and regional transformations

ENERGIA's long-term, systems-focused approach has reshaped national energy sectors, notably the following:

- Kenya: Leading a landmark gender audit that resulted in Kenya's first-ever National Gender Policy in the Energy Sector (2019), a model subsequently taken forward in Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Botswana, Bangladesh, and India.

- Nepal: Partnering with the Nepal Electricity Authority to develop a gender and social inclusion (GESI) Strategy and deliver inclusive electrification in Madhesh Province, connecting 1,300+ previously unelectrified households and supporting 403 entrepreneurs.
- Senegal: Supported women's networks in ensuring gender became a cross-cutting theme, with a dedicated budget, in Senegal's national energy action plan, its Vision 2050, and its Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement.
- ECOWAS region: Helped develop the ECOWAS Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access (2017), a regional framework binding all 15 member states to gender-responsive energy planning.

What makes ENERGIA distinctive

ENERGIA's impact derives from an integrated model almost no other organization has replicated at scale:

- Connects all levels, from grassroots women entrepreneurs to UN intergovernmental negotiations.
- Bridges implementation, evidence, and policy, with rigorous multi-country research directly informing advocacy and ensuring influence is grounded in real data.
- Partnership DNA, working through 140+ national partners rather than direct delivery, multiplying reach while embedding sustainable local capacity.

Lessons learned from ENERGIA's three-decade-long experience

- Empowerment is non-linear and requires long-term, sequenced support. When working with women entrepreneurs, income gains must be accompanied by improvements in confidence and decision-making power. Short project cycles are insufficient to create lasting change.
- Women's enterprises thrive when ecosystems, not just individuals, are strengthened. Women succeed when governments, suppliers, financiers, and service networks around them align and work with them. Only supporting the individual is not enough.
- Access to finance must be paired with market development, digital skills, and supply chain support.
- Policies require sustained accountability and resourcing to transform into real change. Policy adoption is only the starting point. Gender reforms remain vulnerable without stable accountability mechanisms, sustained resourcing, and systems that outlast leadership changes.

The way forward

ENERGIA enters its fourth decade at a critical juncture. Energy transitions are accelerating, yet SDG 7 will not be achieved by 2030. The post-2030 development agenda is being negotiated, and climate pressures intensify every year. Strategic priorities for ENERGIA's next phase include:

- Scaling women's economic empowerment and productive use of energy, especially for last-mile and most-disadvantaged communities.
- Deepening ecosystem-level transformations by embedding gender-responsive planning into utilities, local governments, and market actors so gains outlast projects
- Leading global advocacy for gender-sensitive SDG 7 energy indicators in the post-2030 framework, moving beyond access to equity, agency, and transformation.
- Positioning itself as the go-to technical partner on climate-energy-gender justice, particularly at the food-energy-climate nexus.
- Engaging with green and digital transitions, ensuring women access renewable energy jobs, digital skills, and leadership roles in the energy sector.

ENERGIA's thirty-year journey has been one of unwavering commitment, evidence-based advocacy, and long-term partnerships. During this period, it has shifted the thinking and repositioned women from beneficiaries of energy to active agents of energy transition. With the post-2030 agenda under negotiation and energy transitions accelerating, ENERGIA's mission has never been more consequential.

A word of thanks

For 30 years, everything ENERGIA has achieved has been made possible in close partnership with our donors, partners, and allies, and above all with the women entrepreneurs whose courage and leadership power our collective journey towards a just and inclusive energy transition. We are deeply grateful to each of you, and we look forward to achieving even more together in the years to come.



Photo: Adam Schultz/ENERGIA

SECTION I

Why the ENERGIA story matters

Introduction

The gender-energy landscape today

The gender and energy landscape is evolving as women are increasingly recognized as important energy consumers, producers, and decision-makers who play a key role in energy security and the transition to cleaner energy. Building a more secure, fair and equitable energy future hinges on women's active participation (IEA, 2024). New technologies, digitalization, climate pressures, evolving labor markets and geopolitics are reshaping who participates in, who leads and who benefits from energy systems. As countries work to develop more secure and sustainable energy sources, jobs in renewable energy could grow to more than 38.2 million worldwide by 2030. This could create more employment opportunities for women in renewable energy, resource efficiency, and low-pollution industries. (IRENA and ILO, 2022). New players are entering the gender and energy space, a just energy transition is taking center stage, and the post-2030 development agenda is being negotiated. These developments provide an important opportunity to make gender equality a key focus of the next generation of global development goals.

Yet, significant long-standing challenges remain despite sustained efforts to address them. With less than five years to go until 2030, the world will not achieve Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7), ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all. Current projections indicate that in 2030, 896 million women could lack access to clean cooking fuels and technologies (including 523 million in sub-Saharan Africa), and 321 million women could lack access to electricity (including 275 million in sub-Saharan Africa) (UN Women and UNDESA, 2025). In many parts of the world, reliance on biomass continues, access to clean cooking lags behind population growth, and women remain underrepresented in energy and climate jobs, decision-making, and leadership roles. Climate change has emerged as a threat multiplier, especially for women, with women making up 80% of the population displaced by climate change. Biodiversity loss and climate shocks increase women's unpaid care work by 20-40%, and yet they are largely excluded from climate adaptation and mitigation planning (UN Women and DESA, 2025). Energy remains one of the few SDGs without a gender-specific indicator.

Why ENERGIA matters today

It is in this context that ENERGIA marks its 30th anniversary. Born from a disappointment over the absence of gender and energy issues at the 1995 Beijing Conference and at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, ENERGIA has evolved into a global network on gender and sustainable energy, spanning 26 countries with over 140 partners, impacting over 9 million lives.

ENERGIA's achievements are substantial and multifaceted. Together with the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), and others, ENERGIA contributed to ensuring that clean cooking was included as SDG target 7.1.2. At the global level, ENERGIA co-chairs the SDG 7 Technical Advisory Group (TAG). Through the Gender and Energy Compact, it has mobilized 100+ organizations and can influence major institutions including the World Bank, UN agencies, and development banks. In the countries where it works through partners, ENERGIA has supported the development of pivotal gender and energy policies in Kenya, Nepal, Senegal, and across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). At the same time, ENERGIA has been implementing programs to reach 9 million people through 19,000+ women energy entrepreneurs. It has contributed to creating conducive enabling environments by influencing energy value chains, from production and distribution to last-mile delivery, strengthening institutional capacities, and supporting the development and implementation of gender-responsive government policies. These efforts have helped shift market dynamics and policy frameworks in ways that enable women's meaningful participation in the energy sector and improve underserved communities' access to energy services.

What distinguishes ENERGIA is not any single achievement but its integrated approach and sustained championship for the integration of gender perspectives into energy policy and practice. This document chronicles ENERGIA's journey through the years. The story is one of strategic evolution and attempts to narrate not just what was achieved, but how it was achieved and how a small network focused on awareness-raising evolved into a global authority on gender-energy-climate justice.

ENERGIA's achievements are strongly tied to the long-standing commitment and support received from its donors, especially the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Sida's sustained partnership has enabled ENERGIA to deepen its work, broaden its reach, and effectively scale up its activities. This consistent and substantial support has been a key factor in shaping ENERGIA's current strengths and overall impact. Without this support, ENERGIA would not be in the strong position it holds today.

In this reflection document, we share the lessons we've learned and the challenges we've encountered over 30 years, how we resolved them, and what we are still struggling with. We also take a critical look at the current and emerging global context and discuss pathways for the future to retain the ENERGIA edge and be more impactful in the future. We hope that ENERGIA's story offers lessons not only for the energy sector, but also for the broader development community about how unwavering commitment, evidence-based advocacy, partnerships and alliances can bring about lasting changes in the lives of people globally, to the last mile.



Photo: Bunu Dhungana/ENERGIA

SECTION II

The journey - Seven phases of impact

Genesis and early vision (Phases 1 and 2)

The spark: Beijing Conference 1995

ENERGIA was born out of a disappointment. In September 1995, more than 17,000 participants congregated in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The gathering included 6,000 government delegates, along with more than 4,000 accredited NGO representatives. The resulting Beijing Platform for Action was celebrated as a landmark achievement, identifying twelve critical areas requiring urgent attention (UN Women, 2025). ENERGIA founders Elizabeth Cecelski, Joy Clancy and Margaret Skutsch noticed a glaring oversight. Energy was virtually absent from discussions, and it did not feature among the twelve identified areas of concern, even though it is central to women's health, livelihoods, and lives. Earlier, the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 had placed energy in the context of climate change but ignored women and gender issues (Cecelski, 1995). This disappointment catalyzed action, and a Gender and Energy network was founded in 1996 as a direct response to this gap, evolving into the ENERGIA International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy.

Three long-term objectives of the gender and energy network

- To establish a permanent secretariat on women and energy in an international or regional institution, preferably in a country where large portions of the public are without access to reliable energy.
- To develop informative products, such as research reports, case studies, guidelines, planning tools and training manuals to strengthen gender and energy planning.
- To support, encourage and build capacity for gender and energy planning in national, regional and international institutions.

The founders recognized that the network's first task was to create a space to discuss gender and energy issues. They acknowledged that men and women have different needs and priorities, use energy differently, and experience energy poverty in different ways. In most developing countries, women disproportionately shoulder the burden of managing household energy: collecting fuelwood, cooking – in most cases on smoky fires – and managing the household budgets for heating and lighting. Yet, they have little say in decisions on energy and energy planning. Policy also treated households as undifferentiated units. ENERGIA's founders wanted to ensure that the experiences of Southern women, who are disproportionately affected by energy poverty, would inform energy policy and that these women would have a leading voice in shaping the conversation.

Early years: awakening the world to the issue (Phases 1 and 2, 1996-2002)

Why a newsletter when so much needed to be done?

During the initial years, there was so much to be done. Why did ENERGIA choose to start a newsletter? ENERGIA's founders understood that building a community and sharing knowledge were fundamental to the long-term success of the movement, and even to get started. Over the years, ENERGIA News became the only recognized resource on gender and energy, creating a space for exchange, learning and building a sense of shared purpose among scattered individuals and organizations working on these issues.

ENERGIA's early vision was clear: to ensure that gender perspectives were integrated into energy policy, planning and programs, and that women actively participate in and benefit from sustainable energy transitions. The initial group was informal and consisted of about 30 individuals involved in gender and energy work, who identified and started promoting the group's objectives. However, setting up the ENERGIA network wasn't easy: the idea of linking gender and energy met skepticism across the board. Energy was a highly technical, male-dominated sector. Energy sector professionals also questioned the relevance of gender issues in energy. At the same time, women's organizations and gender advocates wondered why energy deserved special attention. As a result, the issue had no visibility and traction, funding was uncertain, and the network had to build everything from scratch. It needed to influence policy for which it had to generate evidence as none existed, develop new methodologies, tackle the matter of limited representation of women in international energy forums, create partnerships, and build credibility – all at once.

Given these constraints, ENERGIA's strategic focus in its early years (Phase 1 and 2: 1996-2004) was to raise awareness about gender-energy linkages, build legitimacy for the issue, generate foundational evidence, and create a constituency of interested actors. The launch of ENERGIA News, ENERGIA's flagship newsletter, was the most impactful initiative of the foundational phase. In a pre-internet era, the newsletter was the only dedicated source on gender and energy. It shared information and emerged as a community that connected policy makers, practitioners, researchers, interested NGOs, including those in the Global South, academic institutions sharing diverse views and experiences from the field. It also profiled women working on energy issues.

ENERGIA News gave women in the South working on gender and energy issues a voice, a place to publish their work, and a way to connect with an international movement. The authors became the originators of national networks in their countries. ENERGIA News became the pivot around which a network was galvanized. 'ENERGIA members', the people who received and read ENERGIA News, exchanged experiences and information. Many began participating in international events and joining a growing global community. ENERGIA strengthened participants' advocacy skills at international conferences so they could successfully influence decisions in negotiations. Within a decade, several hundred members from dozens of countries joined ENERGIA. Notably, ENERGIA did not try to assemble women professionals in the energy sector, even though some members were. Instead, it focused attention on women's roles in energy access, energy poverty, and energy use as well as supply. Interestingly, several networks were formed later around women professionals in the energy sector.

In Phase 2, ENERGIA worked to enhance the network's capacity, collect and analyze gender and energy data, and equip women and men with knowledge on gender and energy, positioning itself as an advocacy and advisory service provider. Activities also included support for publications on gender and energy, speakers for workshops, training materials, and funding for energy projects that focus on or incorporate gender aspects.

Early on, the founders made two important decisions about how to organize the network, which remain the foundation of ENERGIA's core principles today. First, the network should reflect the energy situation as experienced by women in the South and give them a voice at the global level. Second, to ensure maximum Southern involvement on a limited budget, ENERGIA would forge partnerships with existing organizations interested in women and energy rather than setting up national offices. These would act as network hubs that would provide grassroots women with a connection to the international community.

Accordingly, ENERGIA forged partnerships with other Southern networks, including the Red Mesoamericana de Género en Energía Sostenible (GENES), the Meso American Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy, and national and sub-regional networks in Africa. Doing so established ENERGIA's identity as a network that reflected the voices of Southern women.

CSD-9, an early win

CSD-9 was a gamechanger, and for the first time, the outcome document of a major global event, the CSD-9 Report referred to gender aspects. It recognized the need to ensure equal access for women to sustainable energy technologies, services and opportunities through needs assessments, energy planning and policy formulation at the local and national levels. It also outlined the negative impacts on human health of indoor and outdoor air pollution, especially on women and girls, and acknowledged the importance of promoting women's participation in the energy sector (UN, 2001).

ENERGIA members started participating in major global events and influencing international agendas, like the Rio 1992 follow-up processes, the 1998 Village Power Conference, the ninth session of the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-9), 2001, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, with Sida support. At these platforms, ENERGIA members raised gender and energy issues, engaged with key stakeholders, organized side events, and advocated for gender integration in energy discussions. At WSSD, ENERGIA's advocacy efforts helped secure recognition of women as a 'major group', and a representative from ENERGIA was invited to represent 'women as a major group' in the energy discussion during the UN plenary session. ENERGIA presented language on gender and energy, which the Women's Caucus for WSSD accepted and incorporated into the statement the Caucus delivered to the UN plenary.

By then, recognition of the gender-energy linkage was growing. Organizations like the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP), the African Development Bank (AfDB), UN Women (then UNIFEM), United Nations Development Program Sustainable Energy and Environment Division (UNDP/SEED), National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL/US), and the Regional Wood Energy Development Program of FAO began acknowledging gender dimensions. They also sought ENERGIA's assistance, as it was virtually the only organization working on gender and energy.

Around this time, UNDP started working on gender and energy, focused on household energy, cooking fuels, and rural electrification, recognizing that energy poverty disproportionately affected women and girls. UNDP's earliest publication, "Gender and Energy for Sustainable Development: a toolkit and resource guide," was developed with ENERGIA (UNDP, 2004). This resource guide was designed to help planners and practitioners integrate gender and energy considerations into development programs, including those focusing on energy improvements as well as other types of programs. Elizabeth Cecelski was invited to join ESMAP's Technical Advisory Group and helped design its gender program.

Building the foundation: capacities and constituency (Phases 3 and 4)

During Phases 3 and 4 (2004-2011), ENERGIA expanded its work along three distinct, but mutually reinforcing workstreams: capacity building, research and analysis, and advocacy and advice. This integrated strategy would become a hallmark of ENERGIA's model.

Gender audits: a tool for influencing energy policies and programs

In Kenya, working together with the Ministry of Energy, ENERGIA supported a comprehensive gender audit of the energy sector that eventually led to the development of Kenya's first gender-responsive energy policy, a model that would be replicated in other countries.

For the first time, a government ministry audited its own work, generated its own country-specific evidence on how women and men use energy differently, identified barriers women face in accessing modern energy, identified the absence of women in energy decision-making, analyzed gaps in energy policies and agreed on specific actions for gender integration. All national stakeholders were engaged throughout the process, building ownership and providing a baseline for tracking progress.

- Building resources and capacities: Even when energy sector organizations acknowledged gender's relevance, they still lacked the expertise needed to apply it in practice. In response, ENERGIA developed a comprehensive set of five gender and energy training packages, called the 'Gender face of energy', under the "Turning Information into Empowerment: Strengthening Gender and Energy Networking in Africa" (TIE ENERGIA) program (ENERGIA, 2008). The European Union, Sida, and the Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) co-funded this effort.
- During this phase, ENERGIA developed its flagship methodology for Gender Audits. Gender audits systematically examine how energy policies, programs and institutions affect women and men differently, identify gaps and biases, and provide recommendations for gender integration. Policymakers and practitioners, including government institutions, NGOs, and knowledge institutions, were trained to apply gender audits under TIE ENERGIA.

- **Generating evidence through research:** In a collaborative research program that brought together gender and energy experts, ENERGIA conducted research and developed case studies on varied topics including gender-differentiated energy needs and use patterns, health, time and poverty impacts of energy technologies, economic dimensions of women's energy access and institutional barriers to gender integration (Cecelski, 2004). This research was funded under the UK Department of International Development Knowledge and Research program (DFID-KaR) and generated some of the earliest solid evidence that energy access is central to development outcomes – particularly for women – at a time when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not acknowledge energy at all. It shifted the narrative from viewing energy as a narrow technical sector to recognizing it as a cross-cutting enabler of health, education, livelihoods, and gender equality. The findings were widely disseminated across UN agencies, donors, and global advocacy networks, helping build momentum to place energy at the heart of the post-2015 agenda and strengthening the push for a dedicated global energy goal. This work laid essential groundwork for what later became SDG 7 and ensured that gender stayed firmly embedded in the global energy discourse.
- **Advocacy and advice:** During this period, ENERGIA started advising governments, international organizations, and development banks on integrating gender in energy policies, programs and projects. This included policy analysis and recommendations, project design input, institutional gender assessments, and strategic guidance on gender mainstreaming. The opportunity to provide advice helped position the gender and energy nexus within other cross-sectoral objectives of health, poverty, education, and environmental sustainability and highlight the importance of gender-disaggregated data.

Creating a groundswell through national networks

During phase 3, ENERGIA created national gender and energy networks in 22 countries, nine in Asia and 13 in Africa, creating a groundswell of advocacy and capacity building. A nationally elected National Focal Point (NFP) organization coordinated each national network. The NFP received small financial support from ENERGIA to undertake national-level work of their choice, typically workshops, advocacy, or research. These networks connected governments, research organizations, NGOs, and women's organizations around common priorities. The national networks understood local issues and could engage with their government, utilities, and other important stakeholders. Most importantly, they were an effective conduit for sharing the experiences of women energy users and producers, articulating their priorities, and engaging with decision-makers. The national networks varied in structure, membership, and activities, reflecting different country contexts, but all shared a common commitment to advancing gender equality in sustainable energy.

Mainstreaming gender in energy projects, programs and policies

During phase 4, ENERGIA systematically started with a focus on integrating gender into energy projects and programs implemented by NGOs and government institutions, supporting them with preparation, design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes. By mainstreaming gender in large-scale energy projects, ENERGIA intended to demonstrate how the project's outcomes could be multiplied, rather than only advocating for a gender approach. By delivering tools, training, and guidance for gender integration in energy projects, policies, and workplaces, ENERGIA opened valuable avenues for engaging a broad spectrum of energy-sector actors and professionals. This area of work grew steadily over the years, with more and more energy sector programs and institutions like ministries of energy, rural electrification agencies, electric utilities, and nationally implemented donor programs approaching ENERGIA for support on gender mainstreaming.

To facilitate these processes, ENERGIA developed practical handbooks on mainstreaming gender into energy projects using a step-by-step methodology for each project cycle, including specific gender tools for various sub-sectors (e.g., biogas, improved cookstoves, rural electrification, etc.). (ENERGIA, 2010a; ENERGIA 2006; ENERGIA undated; Ceceslski and Dutta, 2011). These tools, together with ENERGIA's direct support, guided the processes and steps needed to incorporate gender concerns into projects, procedures, work ethic, and overall structure.

International engagements

Extract from the Outcome document, CSD 15

"The importance of mainstreaming gender considerations, in particular the role of women in management and decision-making, at all levels, was seen as necessary for implementation of the interlinked issues of energy for sustainable development, industrial development, air pollution/atmosphere and climate change." (Chair's Summary, paragraph 8).

In response to growing interest in the issue, ENERGIA intensified its international advocacy. The 15th Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-15, 2007) focused on energy for sustainable development and provided the opportunity to do so. In preparation for CSD 15, ENERGIA organized national multi-stakeholder consultations in 19 countries (11 in Africa and eight in Asia). Through the NFPs, it engaged government officials responsible for the CSD process, raising awareness of the gender-energy nexus and laying the foundation for further work on mainstreaming gender within receptive governments. At the event, ENERGIA presented evidence on gender-energy linkages, networked with governments and UN agencies and ensured that gender was addressed in discussions and outcomes (ENERGIA, 2025a). As the formal coordinator of 'Women as a Major Group', ENERGIA influenced the outcome documents of CSD 15, the 'Chairman's Summary Reports', to include the policy actions recommended from the gender audits carried out in Botswana, Kenya and Senegal (ENERGIA 2007a).

Phases 3 and 4 firmly established ENERGIA's credibility both in the countries through national networks and internationally. Transforming and evolving rapidly, ENERGIA built on the achievements of the previous phase by collaborating with different partners, participating in events, and offering advocacy support.

Entering the climate change and broader sustainable development discussions

ENERGIA was among the early members of the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) set up at the Conference of the Parties (COP 13) in 2007 and led the advocacy team with Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) on behalf of the GGCA. The team aimed to make gender equality a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and poverty reduction, two pillars of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In 2008, WEDO and ENERGIA established an advocacy team to work closely with government negotiators as technical advisors.

Two years later at COP 15 in Copenhagen, ENERGIA organized events highlighting the gender dimensions of energy and climate, advocated for gender-responsive climate finance, connected with climate negotiators and civil society organizations, and positioned energy access as both mitigation and adaptation strategy. By then, ENERGIA was well positioned to co-coordinate an international alliance to insert gender language into UNFCCC negotiation texts.

Cancún: the turning point for gender in climate policy

COP16 was a landmark moment, marking the first formal integration of gender into UNFCCC outcomes, especially in adaptation, participation, and safeguards (UNFCCC, 2010). While the Cancún Agreements did not explicitly link gender and energy, they created an institutional space and foundation for the issue. Gender was recognized in adaptation. Parties were encouraged to ensure gender-sensitive approaches in adaptation planning. UNFCCC bodies encouraged gender balance. Gender equality and the effective participation of women were recognized as important for climate change action.

2010 was one of the warmest years ever recorded. As a result, the climate debate became a dominant topic and influenced the climate negotiations at COP 16 in Cancún. ENERGIA participated in UNFCCC negotiations and climate discussions at COP 16. It co-authored policy recommendations for climate negotiators, pushing for gender-responsive measures in mitigation, climate finance and technology transfer. In collaboration with WEDO, it worked to incorporate a gender perspective into climate change discussions (ENERGIA and WEDO, 2010).

It developed factsheets, papers and publications, including ENERGIA News, to raise awareness of the role women can play as energy users, providers and in addressing climate change. This document was explicitly targeted at climate negotiators, aligned closely with the new climate architecture, and positioned ENERGIA as a thought leader in the gender-energy-climate nexus (ENERGIA, 2010b).

Walking the talk: demonstrating impact at scale (Phase 5)



Photo: Fid Thompson/ENERGIA

Shifting to a new institutional home

In 2016, ENERGIA shifted to Hivos International, which became the network's institutional home. ENERGIA's Philosophy was perfectly aligned with Hivos whose work is grounded in social justice, feminist values, and rights-based development. The transition marked a deliberate shift toward a globally anchored, professionally managed, and strategically networked model for advancing gender-responsive energy access. Moving under Hivos's stewardship gave ENERGIA the governance systems, financial management, and global visibility needed to scale. It also brought ENERGIA into a political space that recognizes women's agency, voice, and economic rights as central to transforming energy systems (Hivos, 2025). This transition enabled the network to expand its programs across Africa and Asia, deepen policy influence, professionalize operations, and position gender-responsive energy access as a rights issue. In effect, the move transformed ENERGIA from an informal network and coalition into a globally recognized platform shaping energy and climate agendas at national, regional, and multilateral levels.

Advancing women's economic empowerment: from policy to practice

It was in Phase 5 (2012-2017) when ENERGIA embarked upon its most ambitious effort to show that empowering women entrepreneurs is central to achieving universal energy access and sustainable development. This marked a strategic evolution in ENERGIA's trajectory: its global advocacy and capacity-building work would now be reinforced by on-the-ground results showing that women entrepreneurs are not just beneficiaries but can drive energy access at scale; evidence would be generated through implementation; women would be empowered as energy entrepreneurs.

In 2014, ENERGIA launched its Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) program, which, to date, has worked with over 19,000 women-led energy enterprises and reached 9 million last-mile consumers with clean energy. Starting with six countries – Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, and Nigeria in Africa; Nepal and Indonesia in Asia. The program is currently being implemented in all of these countries, except Indonesia.

WEE program's entrepreneurship development model is comprehensive: training women to become energy entrepreneurs, in selling, distributing, and sometimes installing solar systems, improved cookstoves, and other clean energy technologies. In some countries, entrepreneurs are supported to adopt productive uses of energy in various value chains such as agriculture, animal husbandry, micro-businesses and productive machinery. The program provides comprehensive, yet customized support to energy entrepreneurs and in other value chains:

- Training, covering entrepreneurship, business management, technology and technical skills, financial management, marketing, customer service, and leadership and agency.
- Access to finance, connecting women entrepreneurs to financial services including microfinance, business loans, equipment financing, and working capital.
- Market linkages, connecting women entrepreneurs to energy product suppliers, distributors and retailers, utilities and energy service companies, and customers through various channels.
- Customized mentoring for business development including in business planning, registration, bookkeeping, inventory management, taxation, troubleshooting assistance, refresher trainings, and peer learning platforms.
- Mobilizing communities, to create demand for clean energy products, address cultural barriers to and build acceptance for women's entrepreneurship.

The initial results were promising. By 2017, the WEE program had worked with more than 1,500 women energy entrepreneurs who collectively reached millions of last-mile consumers with clean energy solutions. They generated income for women averaging substantial increases over previous earnings, demonstrated viable business models for inclusive energy distribution, and created transformative changes in women's confidence, status, and decision-making power within households and communities.

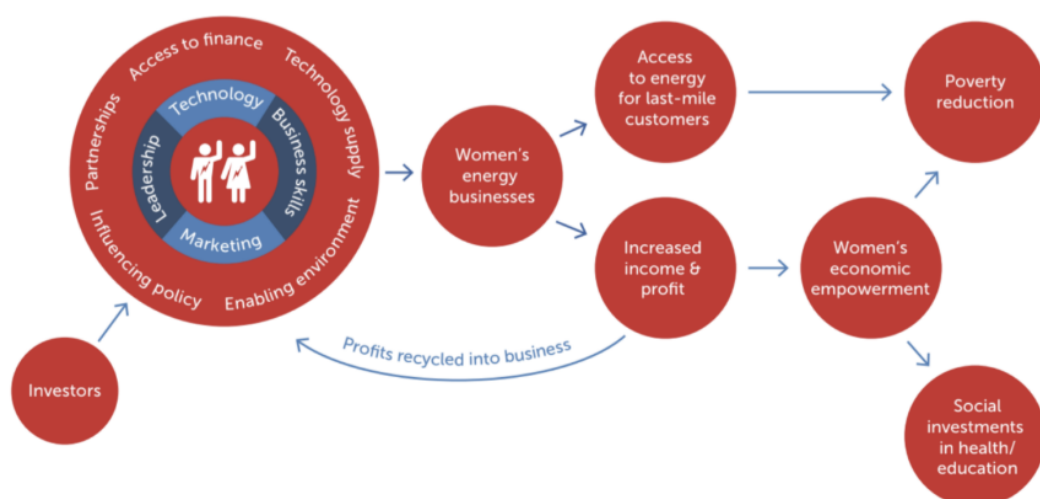


Figure 1. The WEE model

Around the same time, ENERGIA started implementing other projects like the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-supported JFPR 9158: “Improving Gender-Inclusive Access to Clean and Renewable Energy in Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka”, which ran from 2012-2015. The project’s primary goal was to increase rural poor women’s access to affordable, reliable clean energy while mainstreaming gender into energy policies and programs. The ADB project was strategically aligned with ENERGIA’s core goals on women’s empowerment through energy entrepreneurship

The WEE program and the ADB projects enhanced ENERGIA’s credibility. ENERGIA had long argued that women could be effective energy entrepreneurs. The WEE program generated robust evidence for its policy influence work: it demonstrated at scale that with a holistic package of services, women proved highly effective as energy entrepreneurs, particularly in reaching other women, disadvantaged groups, and last-mile communities.

Integrating clean cooking into SDG 7

2015 was a seminal year in international development and climate change with the global community adopting the Paris Agreement and the SDGs. SDG 7, “Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”, included target 7.1.2 on clean cooking: “By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services.” The indicator framework explicitly tracks access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking, recognizing the disproportionate impacts on women.

The process of integration of clean cooking into SDG 7 was led by the World Bank and WHO through UN Energy processes and the High-Level Dialogue on Energy. ENERGIA strengthened the agenda by supplying the gender-responsive evidence, analysis, and advocacy that demonstrated why clean cooking is essential for women's health, livelihoods, and economic empowerment. Through its multi-country evidence, policy contributions, and engagement with women's networks, ENERGIA helped global energy actors recognize clean cooking not just as a technical access challenge but as a gender equality and development priority. This work strengthened the main agencies' leadership driving the SDG 7 agenda. ENERGIA also pushed for gender-disaggregated data collection, explicitly connecting clean cooking to health (SDG 3) and gender equality (SDG 5) goals. It worked with its in-country partners and other entities to advocate through national channels.

Beyond clean cooking, ENERGIA has contributed analysis and evidence that informed the development of indicators on household air pollution (SDG 3.9.1) and unpaid domestic work (SDG 5.4.1), helping to highlight their links to energy access. ENERGIA also contributed to the policy brief on interlinkages between SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 7 (energy), demonstrating how progress on these goals is mutually reinforcing.

Embedding gender consideration in the SEforALL initiative

In 2011, the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative was launched by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon. SE4ALL adopted three ambitious goals to be achieved by 2030: universal energy access, doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix, and doubling the rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

ENERGIA capitalized on this opportunity to ensure gender was incorporated into SEforALL's framework. It did so by participating in SE4ALL working groups and consultations, providing technical inputs on gender-responsive energy access, supporting women's participation in SE4ALL forums, and generating evidence on why gender matters for achieving SE4ALL goals. A key input was an assessment of how the SEforALL country action plans integrated gender considerations (IUCN, 2017). As a result, SEforALL's strategy commits to mainstreaming gender across its planning frameworks and in-country work, and Action Agendas include gender as a cross-cutting nexus issue. The SEforALL Theory of Change explicitly includes as Outcome 1, 'Inclusive and gender-sensitive action mainstreamed' and aims to put gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of energy access and transitions (SEforALL 2022).

Influencing energy policy and programming documents

As in previous phases, ENERGIA continued engaging with and influencing key energy sector and development organizations, driving the integration of gender perspectives across documents, frameworks, global reports, projects, and policies. In 2012, led by Joy Clancy, ENERGIA experts authored the gender-energy background paper for the World Development Report 2012, bringing global attention to how social norms and power relations shape women's energy access (Clancy et al, 2012). This contribution helped embed gender equality into the World Bank's energy agenda. Later, ENERGIA supported the SDG7 custodian agencies in preparing the Global Tracking Framework (GTF) reports in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018, providing evidence and insights that strengthened the analysis. It contributed the gender and energy nexus chapter for the 2015 report and the State of Electricity Access report (SEAR) (Dutta et al., 2017), and provided input on the multi-tier framework indicator and the development of gender standards for monetizing access to clean energy. ENERGIA also influenced the Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) to prioritize the promotion of women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in its energy access portfolio. This translated into a call for proposals on 'Women & Sustainable Energy', a grant to promote women's role in sustainable energy value chains.

Amplifying grassroots voices

During phase 5, ENERGIA utilized global forums to amplify the voices and views of grassroots women, including energy entrepreneurs and community leaders. The annual SEforALL forums and the COPs featured several of the ENERGIA women entrepreneurs, inspiring and empowering them. The women shared their testimonies and perspectives with global leaders, energy ministers and UN officials, in person and in their own voices. Women's stories were also documented through videos, publications, and media and disseminated throughout. These efforts were instrumental in putting human faces to statistics, demonstrating what ENERGIA had long advocated for, that women weren't just victims of energy poverty but active agents of change and driving energy access solutions.

Multi-country research program

Between 2014 and 2019, ENERGIA led a multi-country research program in 12 countries across Africa and Asia. The research brought together global researchers together with national implementing partners, combining world-class research expertise with on-the-ground experience. This program generated the following: rigorous evidence on how energy access impacts women's economic and social empowerment; the differential impacts of various energy technologies and appliances; gender, energy sector policies and electricity sector reforms; women's energy entrepreneurship, and interlinkages between energy, health, time use, income, and empowerment (ENERGIA 2020). This evidence base, combined with lessons from ENERGIA's WEE work, contributed to further work on policy advocacy, program design, and donor engagement.

Going global: scaling and convergence (Phases 6 and 7)

By the start of phase 6 in 2018, ENERGIA had a solid track record and was known globally as the go-to organization on gender and energy. Building on this, the central focus of ENERGIA's activities during the recent phases has been to engender lasting changes through strategic alliances and scaling its on-the-ground impacts. This is done through fine-tuning methodologies and demonstrating results on strengthening women's energy enterprises, productive use of energy, and working with institutions including electric utilities to integrate gender considerations in their operations. Key engagements to inform and influence policy and practice continued with the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), SEforALL, United Nations High-Level Dialogues and the COPs. ENERGIA continued its work on SDG 7, linking it with SDG 5, engaging in the SDG 7 review process and in multi-stakeholder roundtables and by mainstreaming gender in national and global energy institutions, utilities and organizations.

Co-Chairing the SDG7 Technical Advisory Group

Recognizing ENERGIA's technical expertise, in 2018, UNDESA invited ENERGIA to co-chair the SDG7 Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which was set up in connection with the first review of SDG at the HLPF in July 2018. The SDG 7 TAG was established to seek and facilitate the exchange of expert advice on strengthening the follow-up and review of SDG 7 and its interlinkages with other SDGs (IISD 2023). The SDG 7 TAG's membership draws from governments, UN system, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders, with balanced regional and gender representation. Co-chairing the TAG is a remarkable achievement for ENERGIA.

With the objective of “Catalyzing Action towards Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment to accelerate a Just, Inclusive and Sustainable Energy Transition”, the Gender and Energy Compact aims to drive an inclusive energy transition by helping to:

- Increase women’s access to and control over sustainable energy products and services.
- Encourage countries and regions to reformulate and adopt more inclusive and gender-responsive energy access and transition pathways.
- Create entrepreneurship opportunities for women-led businesses.
- Develop tools, knowledge, and gender-disaggregated data to measure progress, raise awareness, and create an evidence base for inclusive, gender-responsive policy and program development.
- From this position, ENERGIA advocated for stronger gender integration in SDG 7 monitoring, pushed for better clean cooking data and tracking, highlighted interlinkages with other SDGs through compelling policy briefs, elevated the importance of energy quality and reliability beyond simple access, emphasized equity dimensions, ensuring the most marginalized are reached, and contributed to the SDG 7 review processes at the HLPF (ENERGIA 2025b).

The Gender and Energy Compact

Perhaps ENERGIA's most visible recent achievement is the Gender and Energy Compact, launched at the 2021 UN High-Level Dialogue on Energy. The Compact emerged from a Call to Action at the 2020 Vienna Energy Forum, where ENERGIA mobilized organizations to demand concrete commitments on gender and energy.

The Compact is a voluntary multi-stakeholder initiative that brings together Member States, government agencies, private sector actors, civil society and youth groups, and international organizations. The signatories make specific, time-bound commitments to advance gender equality in energy access, workforce, leadership, policy, and climate action. As of today, over 100 entities have signed the Compact with commitments.

The Compact, a global coalition, is coordinated by ENERGIA, the Global Women's Network for the Energy Transition (GWNET), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and Sustainable Energy for ALL (SEforALL). ENERGIA serves as the Compact Secretariat, coordinating implementation, tracking commitments, organizing events and knowledge sharing, reporting on progress, and mobilizing new signatories.

The Compact represents a new phase of ENERGIA's work, moving from advocating for gender integration to organizing collective action and demonstrating tangible progress through concrete commitments.

What we are proud of: achievements, challenges and lessons learned



Photo: Adam Schultz/ENERGIA

Since its founding in 1996, ENERGIA has pioneered the integration of gender perspectives into energy policy discourse, an area historically overlooked in both the development and energy sectors. It has influenced policy frameworks, national strategies, and global development goals, positioning gender equality as a core component of sustainable energy access. Through innovative programs, rigorous research and advocacy, the network has influenced policy frameworks, national strategies, and global development goals across more than 20 countries, trained thousands of women as clean energy entrepreneurs, and built an evidence base that helped shift the terms of the debate. It has demonstrated that gender-responsive approaches accelerate both energy transitions and women's economic empowerment. ENERGIA's work has reshaped how governments, donors, and development organizations understand and implement sustainable energy initiatives, proving that achieving universal energy access and gender equality are not parallel goals; they are inseparable.

This chapter reflects on these achievements. ENERGIA has worked in and evolved within a landscape marked by persistent structural barriers, institutional inertia, and uneven political commitment. ENERGIA's story is not only one of achievements, but it is also one of navigating resistance, recalibrating strategies, and learning from what did not work as expected.

Impacting millions of lives

Operating across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, ENERGIA has transformed millions of lives by showing that energy solutions are most effective and equitable when women are positioned as decision-makers, entrepreneurs, and beneficiaries rather than passive recipients. The Women's Economic Empowerment program now operates in five countries (Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, Nigeria and Nepal), supporting 19,000+ women energy entrepreneurs who have reached 9 million last-mile consumers with clean energy solutions. These women entrepreneurs have started and grown resilient renewable energy businesses and use energy for productive purposes. As businesswomen and entrepreneurs, they are experiencing visible improvements in their economic standing. Beyond that, their newfound empowerment and agency have been profound, reflected in their social standing and leadership in their homes and communities. Time savings from not having to collect firewood, combined with financial independence, have given women greater control over their lives. Specifically, the following impacts stand out:

- **Quality of life.** 90% of women entrepreneurs report improvements in their quality of life, and half describe the change as significant. Key drivers include higher household income (53%), business expansion (31%), and the ability to pay for children's education (25%).
- **Economic impact.** 91% of the supported entrepreneurs report higher business revenues, and on average, each enterprise creates work for an additional four people.
- **Women's agency and social status.** The same study shows that 81% of women entrepreneurs experience increased respect and recognition within their communities.
- **Customer satisfaction.** Insights from more than 79,000 off-grid energy customers show that women-led enterprises consistently achieve higher customer satisfaction scores, underscoring the value they bring to last-mile energy markets.
- **Impact on time poverty.** Access to clean energy services reduces the time women spend on labor-intensive household tasks, allowing more time for income generation, skills development, and rest.

Insights to inform future programming for WEE

As ENERGIA reflects on a decade of implementing the WEE program, several critical lessons and challenges persist beneath the headline results. We recognize that the 60 Decibels survey and its results represent ENERGIA's successful cohort: women who completed the program and remained engaged long enough to be included in the survey. As expected, attrition rates have varied considerably by country and context, and women who dropped out are largely invisible in the statistics. The WEE program offers the following critical lessons.

1 Empowerment of women and disadvantaged groups is not linear.

For income gains to sustain and empower women, they must be accompanied by improvements in confidence and decision-making power. For some women, limited ability to negotiate within the household or take leadership roles restricted economic gains. This required repeated training, continued mentoring, peer support, and shifts in the ecosystem. Hence, WEE programs must plan for sequenced empowerment, not assume that income automatically translates into agency.

2 Market barriers and shocks disproportionately affect women-led enterprises.

Despite program inputs, many women entrepreneurs still operate with low margins, struggling with supply chain volatility and with limited access to growth capital. At the same time, because women have smaller buffers and fewer assets, their businesses are more vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, inflation, currency fluctuations, and climate-related shocks. Hence, sustaining entrepreneurial gains beyond the program's lifetime will be the real litmus test for ENERGIA and its partners. Given this, WEE programs must integrate resilience-building as a central element, including insurance, savings, diversified products, and climate-smart business models.

3 Women's enterprises grow when ecosystems, not individuals, are strengthened.

The WEE program showed that women succeed when government agencies recognize and support them, when suppliers offer fair terms, when financiers understand their business cycles and offer products aligned to their needs, when reliable after-sales service networks are available nearby, and when their families support them. Hence, WEE must necessarily be viewed as an ecosystem intervention, not an individual intervention. Scaling requires strengthening market actors around women, not only women themselves.

4 Access to finance is necessary but not sufficient.

Even when women accessed microcredit, loans from cooperatives, or VSLA-linked loans, many still struggled to scale because of other factors: thin margins in last-mile markets, high transportation costs, customers with poor affordability, limited digital literacy, limited access to mobile phones, and reliance on mobile money. The lesson is that finance must be paired with market development, digital skills, and supply chain strengthening to translate into real growth.

5 Finally, gender-transformative change requires long-term engagement.

We have seen repeatedly that short project cycles (2-3 years) are insufficient to shift norms, strengthen institutions, and build sustainable enterprises. Scaling, especially in the more recent phases of the ENERGIA program, has remained constrained by financing and ecosystem gaps. Donors must invest in multi-phase, multi-year WEE programs that combine enterprise support, policy engagement, and ecosystem strengthening.

Country-level transformations

Kenya: A model for gender responsive energy policy

ENERGIA's work with the Kenyan energy sector, spanning over two decades, demonstrates its comprehensive approach to country-level engagement, starting with energy sector policy assessment, policy development, institutional embedding, and implementation. The process began in 2007 with a gender audit of Kenya's energy sector, documenting gender dimensions and gaps (ENERGIA, 2025c). The collaborative process culminated in Kenya's Ministry of Energy developing and adopting the National Gender Policy for the Ministry of Energy (Ministry of Energy, Government of Kenya, 2019), a first-ever government document establishing clear commitments to gender equality across all ministry functions.

Following this, ENERGIA supported gender mainstreaming in the Ministry and the State Agencies, including Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA), Kenya Nuclear Electricity Board (KNEB), Kenya Electricity Generating Company (KenGen), and Rural Electrification and Renewable Energy Corporation (REREC). The gender committees in these institutions received training, developed action plans, allocated budgets, tracked progress, and embedded gender considerations in organizational culture and operations. Five years after the policy launch and through its partner, Practical Action, ENERGIA was asked to review Kenya's National Gender Policy in Energy. Beyond the gender policy, ENERGIA also worked with Kenyan partners on clean cooking advocacy, electric cooking promotion, and renewable energy entrepreneurship.

After Kenya, the gender audits offered a roadmap for reforming the energy sector in a gender-sensitive way and provided a model used in several other country contexts, including Nigeria, Ghana, Botswana, Senegal, Lesotho, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. The structured progression from audit to policy to institutional embedding offers a replicable pathway that other actors in the sector have drawn on.

Sustaining gender mainstreaming in the Kenyan energy sector

Kenya's National Gender Policy in Energy has been widely recognized, but its implementation has faced challenges. The twelve-year journey from the 2007 gender audit to the 2019 policy underscores how long systemic change takes and how vulnerable gender reforms are to shifting leadership, donor priorities, and funding cycles. ENERGIA's WEEK Phase 3 review shows that although gender committees were trained and action plans developed, sustaining political will, budgets, and accountability has been difficult, made worse by staff turnover and the limited authority of gender units. These issues were compounded when gender indicators were removed from SAGA CEOs' Performance Contracts in 2023/24 to 2024/25, following a shift in government policy, which slashed budgets for gender activities and stalled operationalization of the policy (The Policy Practice, 2026).

The broader lesson is that policy adoption is only the starting point. Without stable accountability mechanisms, long-term resourcing, and systems that outlast leadership changes, gender reforms remain vulnerable and require repeated re-engagement. In general, and beyond Kenya, institutional acceptance of GESI has been neither easy nor uniform across countries and institutions. While some ministries and utilities in some countries embraced gender mainstreaming in totality, others adopted policies without allocating budgets or establishing accountability mechanisms. This slowed implementation and required repeated engagement.

Nepal: a model of GESI-responsive rural electrification

ENERGIA has worked in Nepal's energy sector since the early 2000s, partnering with electricity and renewable energy organizations. Its recent work, notably through the ADB-supported TA 6526, illustrates a GESI-responsive and inclusive model of rural electrification. Through two consecutive technical assistance projects, ENERGIA partnered with Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), to develop the Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy (2021) and detailed operational guidelines for implementation. Between 2021 and 2025, the ADB TA 6526 NEP project demonstrated that electrification becomes transformative when it purposefully integrates GESI principles and approaches.

Working in Nepal's Madhesh Province, Kathmandu Valley, Bharatpur and Pokhara, TA 6526 project pioneered an inclusive electrification model that brings power to poor and disadvantaged communities. It made communities aware about electricity use and safety, created jobs, and strengthened local economies. It helped over 1,300 previously unelectrified poor households access grid electricity and worked with 403 entrepreneurs (primarily women and disadvantaged groups) to create new business opportunities and strengthen existing business ventures through improved productive uses of energy. At the same time, the TA assisted NEA in adopting institutional measures that included: establishing an institutional mechanism to address GESI within NEA; building awareness, understanding, and ownership of GESI across NEA; piloting GESI-responsive measures in the distribution offices and developing and implementing inclusive policies for the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Through these measures, ENERGIA demonstrated a model by which NEA and other utilities can help the most disadvantaged, or last-mile, consumers gain access to electricity and benefit from electricity services. This work has been pioneering, as large energy infrastructure typically bypasses gender considerations, yet these projects affect thousands of people and determine who has energy access for decades. The Nepal experience highlights that, even in a demanding context (such as Madhesh Province), gender and social inclusion can be woven into programs when backed by committed partners and consistent technical guidance (ENERGIA, 2026). However, even within Nepal, the question remains: what happens after the technical assistance ends? The NEA made commendable institutional commitments to GESI, but the real test is the long-term trajectory of GESI within NEA.

Making women's voices count in national policy making

A women's network influences key national documents in Senegal

Thanks to the networks supported by Mercy Corps, gender is a cross-cutting theme in Senegal's national energy action plan, with a budget allocated to implement concrete gender actions in renewable energy projects. Beyond national planning, this action plan informed Senegal's Vision 2050, its Just Energy Transition Partnership, and its Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement, demonstrating how gender-responsive energy planning can integrate across frameworks.

When a woman entrepreneur emerges as a role model, it reinforces her own sense of agency and, at the same time, inspires others in her community. As women take on leadership roles, they gain greater access to decision-making spaces, including local governance systems, energy planning, and business and community networks, enabling them to exercise voice and influence. These are essential components of building and sustaining agency.

Women entrepreneurs under the WEEK3 project in Kenya served as spokespersons for other women and played an active role in validating the County Energy Plan for Meru County. Their participation ensured that women's voices and priorities were reflected in local energy planning.

In Senegal, Mercy Corps and Energy for Impact have trained women entrepreneurs in public speaking and advocacy. Mercy Corps also links them with women's networks like the Réseau des Agricultures du Nord (REFAN) and Réseau National des Femmes Rurales du Sénégal (RNFRS). These networks provide a platform for their capacity building, advocacy, and representation. They also facilitate women's access to markets, land, equipment, and financing. Through these networks, rural women engaged with the Ministry of Energy to include gender in its long-term action plan for the energy sector, the Senegalese Rural Electrification Action Plan (ENERGIA, 2025d).

Through these efforts, ENERGIA and its partners have created spaces for women entrepreneurs and users in electrification committees, in dialogues with suppliers and financial institutions, and in consultations with government, ensuring women weren't just recipients but participants in shaping the energy transition.

The limits of participation

Participation is necessary, but not sufficient for meaningful contribution. Women can be present in consultations and validation exercises without meaningfully shaping outcomes if the structures they participate in are not designed to incorporate their views. A key lesson for ENERGIA moving forward is the need to systematically track whether women's priorities are ultimately reflected in investment decisions, budget allocations, and infrastructure planning. Strengthening methods to follow influence through to downstream implementation will be essential for ensuring meaningful and effective participation of women in energy decision-making.

Catalyzing regional transformation: ENERGIA's influence on gender and energy policy

Beyond individual countries, ENERGIA has played a defining role in regional gender-energy frameworks by partnering with regional institutions to embed gender considerations into their policy and practice. The most significant example was ENERGIA's collaboration with the ECOWAS Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). In June 2017, countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), represented by the Ministries of Energy, validated the Policy for Gender Mainstreaming in Energy Access (ECOWAS, 2017), a policy described by the ECOWAS Commissioner for Energy as "revolutionary" for its ambition to ensure that all regional energy programs, projects, and investments are gender-inclusive. This regional policy commits all 15 ECOWAS member states to gender-responsive energy planning, providing a framework for national action, legitimacy for country-level advocacy, and a basis for regional cooperation and learning. ENERGIA assisted ECOWAS through technical assistance in policy development, capacity building for ECOWAS officials, support for national-level implementation, and regional knowledge-sharing platforms.

Regional policies like ECOWAS have created multiplier effects, influencing other countries and creating peer pressure and learning opportunities. Beyond West Africa, ENERGIA has played a catalytic role in shaping gender-responsive energy agendas across multiple regions by generating evidence, strengthening networks, and influencing policy processes. Through regional reports for Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific, ENERGIA provided region-specific gender-energy profiles and policy recommendations that informed the debates at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) events. In East Africa, ENERGIA built regional networks of government officials, civil society organizations, academics, and practitioners to influence energy and development policies, leading to greater integration of gender considerations in clean cooking and rural electrification programs.

In partnership with the Climate Investment Funds (CIF) and the African Development Bank, ENERGIA co-developed gender and energy country briefs for Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, providing sex-disaggregated data, national gender-energy profiles, and concrete recommendations for governments and development partners (CIF, 2020). These briefs were launched at a regional event that brought together over 300 policymakers, gender experts and practitioners, and they now guide gender-responsive project design and policy development across the region. In South Asia, ENERGIA's national consultations and evidence generation strengthened regional advocacy and informed SAARC-level discussions on women's energy access and entrepreneurship (ENERGIA, 2007b). In Latin America and the Pacific, ENERGIA partnered with regional networks to embed gender perspectives into energy strategies, strengthening women's roles in energy access and resilience planning.

Lessons for enhancing regional policy implementation

Globally, policies are often designed as statements of intent. The ECOWAS gender policy commits member states to gender-responsive energy planning, and with ECREEE's coordination, most member states have developed National Action Plans for implementation. However, from the outset, the policy acknowledged that enforcement depends on the constituent governments' willingness to act on the policy and that "the onus lies on the constituent governments of the community to provide incentives" for implementation, confirming that the policy itself has no strong enforcement mechanism (Maduekwe and Factor, 2021). Eight years after the policy's validation, ECREEE developed a measurement framework to track implementation. In November 2025, ECREEE validated a Gender Equality Index for the region, suggesting that a systematic assessment of what has changed on the ground across 15 member states remains a work in progress (News Ghana, 2025). A key lesson is that regional policy influence requires long-term engagement, sustained institution-building, and continued support to help countries move from commitments to measurable change on the ground.

Shaping the global narrative

ENERGIA has always been ahead of the curve on gender and energy. During its formative years, ENERGIA News was groundbreaking as the only resource on gender and energy. Starting with having to make a case for the gender and energy issue in the nineties, the discourse has come a long way. From the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the SDGs, and now the post-2030 agenda, ENERGIA has influenced global platforms and intergovernmental processes to ensure gender equality is recognized as central to sustainable energy transitions.

Southern women's voices shaping energy discourses

At its core, ENERGIA recognizes women not as beneficiaries, but as powerful change agents: entrepreneurs, community leaders, and influencers whose insights and experiences are central to shaping effective policies and programs. ENERGIA brings the perspectives of women and marginalized communities into global discourses through strategic platforms, knowledge networks, and advocacy initiatives. This helps shift how the development community approaches gender and energy issues and asserts that those affected by energy poverty should craft solutions as change agents, not remain mere recipients of policies and programs. Southern women's insights now inform UN frameworks and national energy strategies, ensuring policies reflect real needs rather than assumptions. Centering southern women's voices in global policy has remained both a *modus operandi* and an important outcome for ENERGIA.

Positioning clean cooking as a health and energy imperative

At the time when the SDGs were being designed, ENERGIA's advocacy, alongside the Clean Cooking Alliance, transformed how progress on SDG 7 is to be measured: the coalition successfully lobbied for cooking energy and indoor air pollution, issues that disproportionately burden women, to be formally integrated into the indicator frameworks for SDGs 3, 5, and 7 (UNDESA 2025, GACC and ENERGIA, 2016). Subsequently, launched at the 72nd World Health Assembly in 2019, ENERGIA contributed to the High-Level Coalition on Health, Environment and Climate Change (HEPA). In 2021, along with more than 20 leaders, including ministers of health and energy, heads of international organizations and senior representatives from civil society institutions, ENERGIA endorsed a Strategic Roadmap on Health and Energy (HEPA, 2021). Gender considerations were embedded in the six key recommendations linking clean cooking, women's health, and climate action. Its leadership also extended to the Africa-Europe Foundation's Clean Cooking Manifesto (Africa-Europe Foundation, 2021), where ENERGIA helped position women's energy needs and leadership as central to Africa-Europe cooperation and the call to action to achieve universal access to clean cooking by 2030.

Through these efforts, ENERGIA has significantly influenced the global clean cooking agenda, from securing clean cooking as a target under SDG 7 to integrating clean cooking as a universal health imperative and advancing the narrative on electric cooking as a pathway for women's empowerment and climate-resilient development.

Mainstreaming gender in major programs

Beyond global frameworks, ENERGIA has helped mainstream gender in major energy programs and initiatives while guiding the efforts of major development organizations: Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), African Development Bank (AfDB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Energizing Development (EnDev), Africa Biogas Partnership Program (ABPP), Strengthening the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for Clean Cooking (SEECLEAN) program, to incorporate gender dimensions across energy operations. In the EnDev program, ENERGIA led the development of EnDev's gender strategy (EnDev, 2020) and provided technical assistance to implement it across country programs. In the SEEClean Cooking program, ENERGIA ensures that gender approaches are systematically embedded in program design, enterprise support, and enabling environment activities. ENERGIA was also instrumental in helping launch the World Bank ESMAP and UNDP gender and energy programs.

Earlier, ENERGIA supported gender integration in large-scale energy infrastructure projects through global programs such as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) program, as well as in several national utilities and energy agencies including Kenya Power, Nepal Electricity Authority, Botswana Power Corporation, and others. As part of its gender mainstreaming efforts, it has developed tools, frameworks, and policy briefs for NORAD, the AfDB, the ADB, EnDev, ABPP, and the SEE-CLEAN Cooking program. Seemingly technical energy sector interventions, including off-grid and centralized grid electrification and productive use of energy, have started to consider gender in their programs. This work with major programs multiplies ENERGIA's impact, influencing how development funds are spent and how millions of people are reached.

Lessons on sustaining momentum in global gender-energy policy and programming

Over the years, ENERGIA has helped shift global agendas: contributing to embedding gender in SDG indicators, shaping the HEPA roadmap, and reframing clean cooking as both a health and energy priority. Keeping gender central in global energy debates will require continuing to generate credible evidence, strengthen coalitions, and position gender strategically in conversations and narratives often dominated by technology, finance, and emissions. As ENERGIA's global advocacy must address uneven evidence uptake, shifting priorities, and donor fragmentation, it will need to ensure that influence ultimately translates into real improvements in women's lives. A key lesson for ENERGIA's global advocacy is that real impact lies in turning influence into transformation and ensuring that global, regional, and national commitments lead to tangible gains in women's participation, leadership, and access to clean, modern energy.

Similarly, despite ENERGIA's significant contribution to how some energy programs approach gender, mainstreaming in most large programs remains uneven: technical teams require repeated capacity building, gender expertise remains limited in many institutions, and without clear incentives, mainstreaming can become box-ticking rather than transformation. Moving towards transformation requires confronting structural barriers in labor markets, financial systems, and social norms that programming alone cannot resolve. A key lesson is that effective mainstreaming is not a oneoff activity but an institutional process that requires sustained technical support, embedded gender expertise, and outcome-level assessment to understand whether programs genuinely reach and benefit women differently.

How ENERGIA delivers transformative outcomes: the drivers

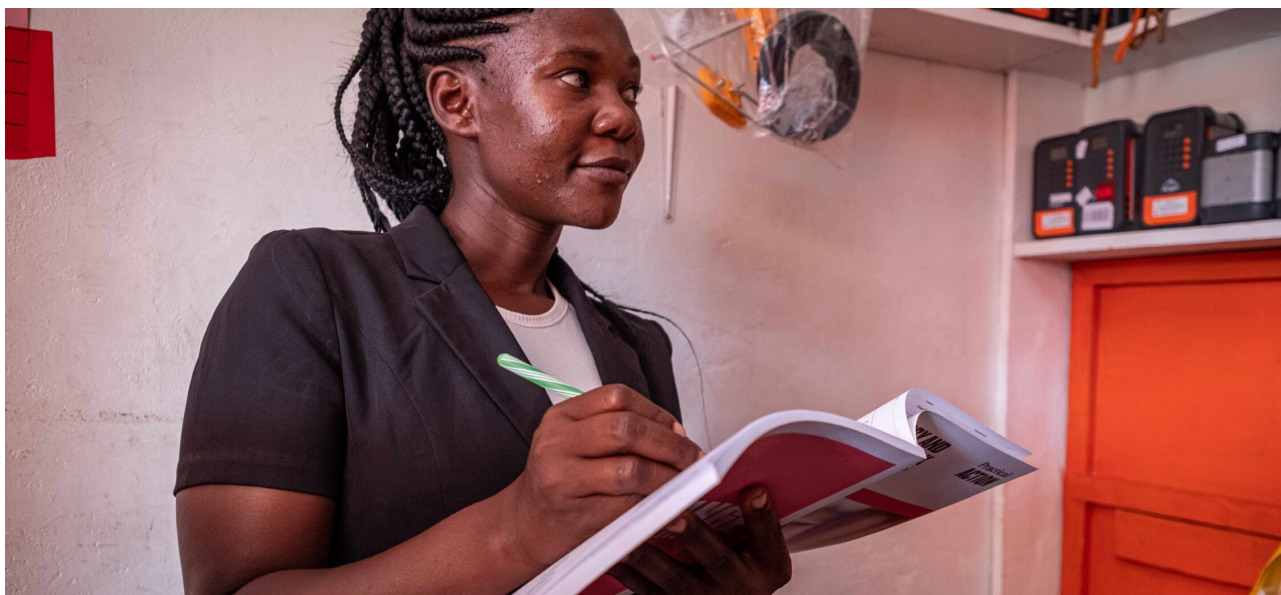


Photo: Joost Bastmeijer/ENERGIA

What is unique about the ENERGIA approach

- Not just advocacy, but action on the ground.
- Not just women in development, but leaders and changemakers.
- Not just policies, but backed by evidence.
- A model built on collaboration, trust, co-creation, and long-term commitment.
- A dynamic and adaptive approach, evolving with the energy and development landscape

ENERGIA represents 30 years of consistent focus and thought leadership on gender and energy. The organization essentially created the gender and energy field when no other organization was focusing on this intersection. Its distinctive strengths include: a long track record and a sustained commitment to the subject since 1996; a proven ability to elevate gender-responsive energy issues on the world stage; and the unique capacity to bridge policy and practice. ENERGIA's development objective is to ensure that women have an equal opportunity to lead, participate in, and benefit from clean energy access and a just and inclusive energy transition. This remains as relevant as ever.

ENERGIA's ecosystem of 140+ partners across 26 countries

- Civil society organizations, women's organizations and social enterprises in Africa and Asia
- National energy ministries and agencies (e.g. Kenya Ministry of Energy, Tanzania Rural energy Agency, Senegal ministry of Petroleum and Energies)
- Utilities, electricity agencies and regulatory agencies
- Women's energy associations in Kenya, Tanzania, Nepal, Senegal, Nigeria
- UN Agencies and international organizations including UNDESA, UNIDO, UN Women, UNDP, UNEP, FAO, IEA, and SEforALL
- Development banks including World Bank (ESMAP), ADB, AfDB
- Bilateral Donors, including those in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Netherlands, UK, and Germany
- Regional entities, including regional gender and energy networks, like ECREEE, SACREEE (Southern African Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency)
- Private sector, including energy companies and technology providers

A partnership model built on collaboration, trust, co-creation and long-term commitment

Rather than implementing programs directly at scale, ENERGIA works through more than 140 partners globally, regionally, and in the countries. Where ENERGIA's direct engagement ends, partners continue the work, spreading innovations through their networks, embedded in their contexts with sustained relationships and capacities, multiplying reach far beyond ENERGIA's direct capacity.

National coalitions, such as the 50+ civil society organizations in Senegal's energy access coalition, create collective voice and sustained advocacy beyond individual projects. In Kenya, Practical Action works with County governments, cascading national policies to the local level.

ENERGIA's role is to convene, build capacity, broker knowledge, and provide strategic support. It is the 'backbone' that enables partners to innovate, take risks, and achieve more than they could alone. This approach creates a collaborative and positive atmosphere for diverse stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector, and women's groups – to convene around issues of common interest. It connects energy practitioners with gender experts, academics with implementers, global platforms with grassroots realities, and the private sector with civil society.

Because energy transitions will continue to require multi-stakeholder collaboration across countries, this approach is important. ENERGIA's network infrastructure and convening credibility enable partnerships that would not otherwise form, and many global organizations lack. This positioning gives ENERGIA unique legitimacy among both policy makers and implementers.

Connecting every link in the gender and energy value chain

ENERGIA's distinctive contribution lies in its integrated strategy, which advances multiple dimensions of change simultaneously. Most organizations in the gender and energy space specialize in one domain, with a minor interest in a few other areas. In contrast, ENERGIA operates across the entire 'gender and energy value chain'. It operates at the intersection of on-the-ground implementation, policy advocacy, capacity building, and research, a combination almost no other organization has achieved at this scale. ENERGIA's value addition is that of a system connector, bridging grassroots implementation with global advocacy, operating effectively across all levels of the energy sector value chain. Through this ecosystem approach, ENERGIA has achieved results others have not: women's economic empowerment through energy entrepreneurship, policy shifts toward gender-responsive planning, and integrating gender into global climate negotiations. ENERGIA's unique role as a bridge organization facilitates knowledge exchange and collaboration that wouldn't otherwise occur.

Convening strategic and long-term alliances that can deliver

ENERGIA takes pride in creating an ecosystem of invested partners by aligning with partners' objectives, building on their respective strengths, and by complementing, not competing. ENERGIA is either a convenor or member of influential platforms like SDG 7 TAG, the HEPA, the Africa-Europe Foundation Women Leaders Network, and the SHINE campaign. It has leveraged these spaces to influence major international frameworks including the SDGs and international climate agreements. These collaborations provide effective avenues to amplify women's voices, promote inclusive approaches, and drive systemic change. Over a hundred institutions from diverse backgrounds have signed up to the Gender and Energy Compact, reflecting a strong global commitment to a gender-just, inclusive, and sustainable energy transition.

End-to-end gender and energy expertise

Over the years, ENERGIA has developed, tested, and disseminated practical tools and methodologies that build understanding and support gender mainstreaming, including ENERGIA's approach to developing gender action plans, training resources, and practical tools to support women entrepreneurs. ENERGIA goes beyond 'what is gender mainstreaming' and shows the 'how' of practical integration of gender in energy policies and practice.

In addition, it has pioneered new approaches and tested new business models. In all countries, ENERGIA's partners have incubated new approaches on last-mile delivery of energy services, on women's entrepreneurship, and in the productive use of energy for women and disadvantaged communities. In several countries, it has also demonstrated a gender and socially inclusive electrification model.

ENERGIA has also engaged in research and generated credible evidence through multi-country research programs, impact evaluations, gender audits, and documentation. This evidence has been crucial in shifting perceptions from 'gender is a nice add-on' to 'gender is essential for effectiveness'.

An adaptive approach

To stay ahead of the curve, ENERGIA has adopted a dynamic, adaptive approach that evolves with changing contexts and emerging opportunities. Responding to new technologies and fuels, ENERGIA pivoted from improved cookstoves to include LPG and, more recently, electric cooking solutions. Responding to shifting landscapes, it has also expanded its scope of work from basic energy access to engage with broader energy transition and climate justice agendas, as well as emerging sectors like e-mobility, the circular economy, and digitalization.

ENERGIA is strategically engaged in post-2030 discussions with key stakeholders on sustainable development. As a learning organization, ENERGIA regularly coursecorrects based on evidence and experience while staying flexible and true to its core values in delivering impact.



Photo: Sven Torfinn/ENERGIA

SECTION III

The road beyond 2030

Change takes time, but it does come

"A lot has changed over the past years. ENERGIA is now a respected organization with an influential presence on the international stage, as shown by its role as co-host of the UN's High Level Political Forum. I have chosen three changes I have seen over the years, to draw attention to and which possibly indicate the direction of the next 25 years.

First, the way the world views women and energy has changed. We began to focus more on 'gender' as relational than on 'women' in isolation, even when projects are focused on women. Our approach has recognized that women and men are not two homogeneous groups but are differentiated across a range of social characteristics, such as ethnicity, and within groups, such as age.

Second, while gender equality has always had male champions, the initial male resistance to gender mainstreaming in energy policy and practice has certainly begun to wane. ENERGIA's advocacy efforts show the contribution that taking a gender approach can have towards achieving policy and project goals, has contributed to reducing this resistance.

The third change has been the interest in the global North, where gender and energy poverty has emerged as an area of policy concern."

JOY CLANCY, FOUNDING MEMBER OF ENERGIA AT 25-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

ENERGIA and its relevance today

"ENERGIA's most significant contribution has been to reposition women at the heart of energy access strategies."

ELIZABETH CECELSKI, FOUNDING MEMBER, ENERGIA

When women are centered in energy transitions, entire communities benefit. Over the years, ENERGIA has worked at the intersection of gender and energy, demonstrating that women can drive transformative change in their homes, communities, the energy sector, and beyond. This becomes possible when women's status and capabilities are enhanced, positioning them to influence businesses, markets, policies, and institutions.

Through its systemic model, ENERGIA and its partners have empowered women as entrepreneurs and leaders, influenced policy, and informed global discourses on energy and sustainable development. It has helped build a generation of women leaders whose businesses reach last-mile consumers and whose voices influence households and markets, contribute to energy sector policies, and advocate for their rights in decision-making spaces and national agendas. The summary below captures the spectrum of ENERGIA's transformative results and sets the stage for defining its strategic direction in the decade ahead.

Impacts that last: a snapshot of ENERGIA's transformative achievements

Impacts that outlast projects

- A systemic, transformative change model designed to embed gender across institutions, markets, and policies.
- Gender and Energy Compact established, mobilizing 100+ commitments from governments, organizations, companies.
- Developed groundbreaking gender and energy policies in several countries and across regions.
- Contributed to shaping global frameworks, including SDG 7 targets for clean cooking and gender-inclusive indicators
- Major development banks and energy programs now apply gender considerations, many using tools and frameworks developed by ENERGIA

Millions of lives positively impacted

- A paradigm shift in thinking, from women as passive beneficiaries to active agents
- Women empowered as entrepreneurs through training, mentoring, market linkages, and finance in clean energy businesses, creating leaders and role models who influence households, markets, and communities
- Clean energy solutions reaching 9 million last-mile consumers, through 19,000+ women energy entrepreneurs
- Strengthened women's collective voice by supporting associations and networks that champion clean energy and influence national policy agendas
- Women entrepreneurs achieve economic independence, report higher incomes, resilience, increased leadership and agency.

Building capacity that lasts

- Gender perspectives embedded into the core operations of ministries, utilities, electrification agencies, and regulators.
- Gender policies, gender-responsive budgeting, staff training and institutional systems adopted by energy sector organizations.
- A global cadre of gender and energy champions created, continuing to influence sustainable development agendas.

Amplifying Southern women's voices

- Elevated perspectives of women and marginalized communities into global energy policy spaces.
- Ensured Southern women shape, and not just receive, energy solutions and policies.
- Their insights inform UN frameworks, national energy strategies, and global advocacy narratives, shifting how the development community approaches gender and energy.

Current imperatives and the way forward for ENERGIA



Photo: Randa Osman/ENERGIA

The global energy landscape is shifting rapidly. The coming years will determine whether the world achieves sustainable energy for all, address the climate crisis justly, and empower women as leaders of energy transition. Despite major global commitments to universal energy access and gender equality, deep and persistent gaps remain, making ENERGIA's mission more relevant than ever.

The gender and energy agenda remains far from complete: 2.1 billion people still lack clean cooking access and 666 million lack electricity, causing energy poverty, a burden that falls disproportionately on women and children (IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank and WHO, 2025). At the same time, women represent only around 16% of the global energy workforce and an even smaller share of energy sector leaders, limiting pathways into future leadership and entrepreneurship in clean energy. Across the sector, women as entrepreneurs and leaders face structural financing barriers, institutional capacity remains weak, and there is a chronic shortage of funding and dedicated budgets for gender and energy actions.

ENERGIA today

ENERGIA envisions a world where women have equitable opportunities to lead, participate in and benefit from universal energy access and the transition to renewable, affordable and clean energy.

Our mission:

- We develop and support creative solutions to enable energy access for some of the 685 million people who lack electricity globally, and the 2.1 billion people living without access to clean cooking technology.
- We work to achieve gender equality across energy initiatives and to drive sustainable development and an inclusive energy transition.
- We champion women's participation at all levels in the energy sector and advocate for greater recognition of the specific challenges women and girls face due to energy poverty and climate change.
- These realities reaffirm ENERGIA's relevance today and establish a clear mandate for its continued engagement in the gender-energy space. They also provide critical insights into how ENERGIA needs to reimagine its future direction and strategic role in driving a gender-just energy transition.

Looking ahead: our strategic direction

As countries accelerate clean energy transitions, the need for socially just and gender-responsive solutions, including women-led entrepreneurship to reach last-mile communities with clean energy services and inclusive greenskills development, is stronger than ever before. ENERGIA is uniquely positioned to rise to this demand by building on what it has built, its power to collaborate widely, and influence policy, connecting ground-level realities and voices to policy and building long-term institutional capacity across governments, private sector actors, and civil society. ENERGIA will chart a new direction that not only addresses today's inequities effectively but also stays ahead of the curve in anticipating the emerging demands of a gender-just energy future. Its 30-year journey has built unparalleled experience and a solid foundation to take a strategic position in the post-2030 world.

Think what women entrepreneurs could do with more investment!

"Counting only the work of ENERGIA and two other women-led programs in the Global South – Solar Sister and Frontier Markets – in less than ten years, 42,000 women entrepreneurs in Africa and Asia have been supported, and these women entrepreneurs have provided energy access to 21 million consumers in low-income communities. Yet, overall, less than 13% of off-grid investment goes to female-led companies, according to the Global Off-Grid Lighting Association. Think what women entrepreneurs could do with more investment!"

ELIZABETH CECELSKI, FOUNDER MEMBER, ENERGIA (CECELSKI, 2024)

A high-priority area for ENERGIA moving forward is deepening and expanding its long-standing work on women's entrepreneurship and the productive use of energy, particularly among poor and last-mile communities. ENERGIA will continue to strengthen women's economic empowerment, agency, and leadership across clean energy and PUE value chains, grounded in the understanding that economic empowerment is inseparable from social empowerment and that women's leadership is essential for inclusive energy transitions. Its holistic entrepreneurship model, addressing restrictive norms, limited mobility, low digital literacy, and weak networks, has shown across multiple countries that when women gain access to digital and business skills, finance, markets, and supportive ecosystems, they become powerful drivers of last-mile energy access and climate-resilient livelihoods.

Through the Recruit-Train-Mentor-Sustain-Scale approach, partners build renewable energy distribution networks, deliver digital and business training, support PUE adoption, and connect entrepreneurs to financiers and market actors. The next phase is to scale this impact: diversifying entrepreneurship models, accelerating last-mile clean energy access, and ensuring that the most disadvantaged communities benefit from the broader energy transition. By combining its grassroots credibility with system-level influence, ENERGIA is well positioned to drive a future in which gender equality is not an add-on to the energy transition but a central force shaping the future of energy transitions.

At the same time, ENERGIA will continue to deepen its work on transforming local energy ecosystems, including local governments, utilities, and market actors, so they deliver equitable outcomes for women and last-mile communities. It will focus on strengthening their capacity to adopt gender-responsive planning and budgeting, while supporting women's collectives to shape energy decisions that affect their lives. By embedding gender objectives, tools, and accountability into routine national and subnational processes, and grounding reforms in community realities, ENERGIA will help create local energy systems where gender equality is institutionalized and sustained, driving more inclusive and resilient energy transitions.

Climate-energy-gender justice represents a particularly strategic area for ENERGIA's leadership. As climate impacts intensify, especially for women and the poorest communities, ENERGIA can position itself as the go-to technical partner for integrating gender into climate and energy projects.

Opportunities are especially strong in the energy-climate-food security nexus, where clean energy solutions like solar irrigation, local processing, and cold storage can strengthen resilience for the poor and for women.

Looking outward, the energy landscape offers several new frontiers where ENERGIA is positioned to take the lead. The most consequential is the emerging post2030 development agenda. At present, SDG 7 on sustainable energy is one of only six SDGs that lack a specific gender indicator. As the UN identifies energy access and affordability as a priority investment area for revitalizing SDG progress (Cecelski 2025), ENERGIA's long-standing engagement with SDG7 custodian agencies places it in a strong position to advocate for gender-sensitive energy indicators that move beyond access to equity, agency, and transformation.

ENERGIA can also expand its relevance by engaging with gender-energy challenges in emerging economies and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, where issues differ but are equally pressing. The green and digital transitions are opening new pathways for women's economic empowerment. Women entrepreneurs need digital readiness (mobile payments, e-commerce, AI-enabled market intelligence), while the surge in renewable energy offers millions of green jobs. ENERGIA can help ensure women access technical and digital roles in installation, maintenance, smart grids, and energy engineering through targeted training, mentorship, and STEM pathways. The circular economy presents another frontier, where ENERGIA can help shift women from low-value informal roles into higher-value innovation and technology-driven opportunities. Across these spaces, strengthening women's organizations as collective actors will be key to unlocking fair access to training, finance, equipment, and markets.

As ENERGIA enters its next phase, the organization will embrace new ways of working aligned with today's rapidly evolving energy and development landscape, while strengthening how it measures progress in these emerging domains. Continuing its philosophy of adaptability, ENERGIA will remain flexible and responsive to shifting political and economic contexts, emerging technologies, and communities' changing needs. Its future approach will deepen women's roles as change agents across green value chains, moving beyond facilitating access to enabling full participation and leadership. At the same time, it will adopt and advocate for measurement frameworks that track what a 'gender-just energy transition' looks like in practice, including indicators on women's agency, quality of work, resilience, and the distributional impacts of fossil fuel phaseout on livelihoods and energy access. Delivering on this agenda will require deeper engagement with youth, broader constituencies, and intersectional groups, recognizing that gender is relational and that meaningful, lasting transformation depends on shifting dynamics within families, communities, and society.

Building on legacy with continued leadership: moving forward

ENERGIA's journey over the past three decades demonstrates that gender-responsive approaches are not merely ethical imperatives but essential catalysts for achieving universal, sustainable energy access. Yet the work is far from complete, and ENERGIA stands at a defining moment. Its legacy of transforming systems, empowering women, and shaping global energy agendas has created a foundation few organizations can claim.

As the world navigates energy transitions, climate adaptation, and digital transformation, ENERGIA's mission of advancing gender equality in sustainable energy has never been more relevant. The world is changing fast, and so must ENERGIA. By embracing new ways of working, expanding into emerging frontiers, and strengthening its resilience, ENERGIA can transform its legacy into a bold, future-focused agenda that keeps women's leadership and justice at the heart of the global energy transition.

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