

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL de DROIT COMPARÉ de L'ENVIRONNEMENT

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF COMPARATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

Special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2015

Observer status with the United Nations Environment Assembly and its subsidiary bodies since 2017

Stronger together: wPOWER partnership leads the way in advancing women's role in clean energy entrepreneurship.

Exposure to smoke from traditional biomass-based (firewood, charcoal and animal waste) cookstoves and open fires – the primary means of cooking and heating for nearly three billion people in the developing world – causes over 4 million premature deaths annually. The majority of these deaths being women and young children as they bear the burden of cooking in many homes in the global south. It is well established that quality energy access and women's quality of life are inextricably linked. We also know that empowering women in the energy space by educating and training them often leads to significant strides in the adoption, proper and sustained use of clean energy technologies. Women are capable of playing a crucial role in the provision of energy access services throughout the supply chain - from planning, production, installation, maintenance, financing and sale of sustainable energy products and services especially at the household level. This is excluding their role as effective decision-makers, policy practitioners, clean energy innovators, entrepreneurs, and impact investors.

We have known these facts for a while, but the critical question is where do we stand now and why haven't we made adequate progress?

While there are several efforts underway marshalling evidence and establishing facts for the impact of female entrepreneurship in the sector, there still remains a deep proverbial chasm when it comes to linking this rhetoric with action in designing and executing scalable programs with gender inclusiveness. The burden is especially acute in Africa and Asia, where women and girls in rural areas can spend up to five hours a day collecting firewood which is at a huge opportunity cost of pursuing education, or doing other productive work. Urban women and girls are not spared the drudgery as they rely primarily on charcoal stoves that are time-consuming to light and are an inefficient way to cook quick meals in these increasingly fast paced environments.

The good news is that the solution is still within our grasp and it's not too late to address it.

The international community has recognized the goal to “ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all” as a Sustainable Development Goal 7. As I have often said, prioritizing women's leadership in clean energy entrepreneurship is investing in our future. How can we enable this initiative? This is where our work with the [Partnership on Women's Entrepreneurship in Renewables](#) (wPOWER) comes into play. wPOWER efforts are underpinned with this same consideration of consolidating the global voice and platform in support of women's participation and promoting their pivotal role in clean energy entrepreneurship.

I'm inspired by the results so far. With a vision to empower 8,000 women to provide clean energy access to 3.5 million people by 2018, wPOWER through its network of dedicated implementers, has already achieved more than half of that goal, empowering over 5,500 clean energy entrepreneurs working in underserved rural and urban areas in the global south who are now the catalysts for raising awareness and increasing energy access within their respective communities.

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Let's look at the example of Judy Angaya, a wPOWER trainee turned entrepreneur. Judy, a native from Western Kenya, attended a 'Training of Trainers' training organised by wPOWER in 2014, in Nairobi. Judy worked with Care International Kenya - one of wPOWER's founding partners under the clean energy program. Her zeal earned her an opportunity to become a trainer on clean energy issues. She attended an Africa - India exchange program as part of a delegation comprising wPOWER representatives from the list of trainees. She now owns a clean energy business where she sells solar lamps and clean cookstoves.

Besides working directly with communities, wPOWER serves as a global platform for forging partnerships and increased collaboration and participation of stakeholders in the clean energy sector at the household level. wPOWER provides an enabling environment for its network of partners in three key areas focusing on advancing gender equality and women's entrepreneurial empowerment:

- **Building Evidence:** wPOWER builds vital evidence on women's roles in advancing the adoption of clean energy technologies through providing public goods for the sector such as toolkits, case studies, reports, and other relevant resources.
- **Sharing Best Practices:** wPOWER shares a rich knowledge base, stories of impact, and best practices from its partners that are both replicable and scalable for effective approaches to clean energy entrepreneurship. This is done through providing access to practical tools, training and resources (available on the wPOWER Resource Page) to all partners and others in the sector.
- **Advocacy:** wPOWER advocates for greater prioritization of women's leadership across the energy value chain, through international, regional and national convenings in conjunction with its partners and relevant stakeholders, including the governments, private sector, and civil society.

Building on the momentum generated thus far, wPOWER will continue to champion innovative clean energy solutions, build on the success of its [partners](#), capture existing best practices and support new evidence development on the role of women in clean energy. This effort requires sustained momentum beyond the rhetoric, sharing lessons and failures of what works, and forging more collaborative and productive partnerships need to address this seemingly intractable problem.

wPOWER is committed to to achieve our shared goal - one of a world free of energy poverty and where women's leadership and entrepreneurship are by design the norm. With greater women's participation, everyone wins.

By: **Wanjira Mathai**, Senior Advisor, Advocacy & Strategy, Partnerships for Women Entrepreneurs in Renewables (wPOWER Hub). As the lead global advocate for the wPOWER partnership, Wanjira represents the issue of women's economic empowerment through clean energy access in local and international forums, particularly making the linkages to the urgency of climate action and the sustainable development goals (particularly goal 7)

Wanjira chairs the board of the legacy-focused Wangari Maathai Foundation. Mathai also sits on the boards of the Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai Institute, and the World Resources Institute. She

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is an advisory council member of the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, co-chair (with the Former Prime Minister of Sweden) of the Global Restoration Council, and a member of the Earth Charter International Council.

The wPOWER Hub promotes the prominence of women's leadership in addressing energy poverty and climate change by bringing renewable energy to 3.5 million women in East Africa, Nigeria and India. wPOWER is the secretariat for the larger partnership.

wPOWER focuses on consolidating and building evidence that supports the strategic involvement of women in clean energy entrepreneurship, spotlighting and scaling of best practices in clean energy entrepreneurship, advocating for women's leadership in clean energy entrepreneurship & in addressing climate change, and building a global partnership of stakeholders involved in the sector.