



ADVANCING THE INCLUSION OF WOMEN, YOUTH, AND REFUGEES IN UGANDA'S RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY ACCESS AGENDA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uganda's renewable energy transition presents a critical opportunity to advance inclusive development, yet women and youth, remain underrepresented and underserved across the energy value chain as consumers, producers, entrepreneurs, and decision-makers. While Uganda has made progress in expanding electricity access and renewable energy generation capacity, this progress has not translated equitably into social and economic empowerment for all population groups.

Women who bear a disproportionate burden of energy and time poverty¹ through unpaid care work limit the amount of time left for activities such as rest, leisure, or even potential income-generating opportunities². It is seen that Ugandan women spend an average of four hours per day on cooking-related activities³. As a result of this debilitating loss of time, their families and communities are negatively impacted. Additionally, exposure to household air pollution and limited access to productive energy persist as systemic barriers in energy markets and institutions.

Youth, despite representing over 73% of Uganda's population⁴ encounter skill gaps, limited financing, and restricted entry into renewable energy entrepreneurship and employment.

This policy brief argues that inclusive renewable energy access is not only a social justice issue but an economic and energy-system imperative.

Integrating women, and youth into renewable energy development enhances uptake, improves sustainability, stimulates job creation, and strengthens community ownership of energy systems.

It also analyses structural barriers to inclusion, reviews the institutional context, and proposes targeted policy recommendations to ensure Uganda's renewable energy transition is equitable, inclusive, and transformative.

INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Multiple institutions shape inclusion outcomes in Uganda's renewable energy sector. The Uganda Gender Policy (2007) provides the overarching national framework for addressing gender inequalities and guides a wide range of actors, including the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD), development partners, local governments, financial institutions, training institutions, private sector developers, and civil society organisations⁵.

Despite this comprehensive policy framework, the mainstreaming of gender, youth, and social inclusion (GYSI) within energy programmes remains weak. The fragmented institutional mandates, limited cross-sector coordination, and the inconsistent integration of GYSI considerations across programme design, implementation, and monitoring have constrained effective inclusion.

Consequently, many energy interventions fail to adequately address underlying power relations, household decision-making dynamics, and structural access barriers, resulting in unequal participation and benefits from renewable energy investments.

How can Uganda’s renewable energy policies, programmes, and markets be redesigned to systematically integrate women, and youth as beneficiaries, entrepreneurs, workers, and decision-makers in energy access and energy system transformation?

ANALYSIS

Women are central to household energy use particularly cooking and to small-scale enterprises that depend on reliable energy services. Despite this role, women in Uganda remain disproportionately affected by energy poverty and underrepresented in renewable energy employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership. Their participation is constrained by limited access to finance, productive assets, and collateral⁶, low enrolment in technical and STEM-related training, and gendered social norms that restrict mobility, decision-making power, and market participation. These barriers are compounded by the inadequate integration of women’s priority energy needs especially clean cooking and productive use of energy into national and local energy planning processes⁷.



[Uganda Bureau of Statistics \(2025\) Thematic Report on the Adolescents and Youths in Uganda](#)
[The Uganda Gender Policy \(2007\)](#)

At the same time, women-led energy enterprises perform strongly, demonstrating high repayment rates, strong community trust, and sustained adoption of clean technologies, particularly in solar, clean cooking, and mini-grid services.

This can be seen from the Women’s Economic Empowerment programme, ENERGIA, the International Network on Gender and Sustainable Energy under the United Nations, 70% of the entrepreneurs who received programme support recorded a positive profit margin in each quarter, and more than 95% who had taken out loans or consignments have not defaulted on loan repayment instalments.

Additionally, 82% of these entrepreneurs were involved in decisions on major household purchase decisions, while 72% were actively taking business decisions for their enterprises⁸. This highlights a missed opportunity to leverage women as both energy users and economic actors and underscores the importance of gender-responsive energy policies and financing mechanisms.

Uganda’s large youth population presents significant potential for economic transformation; however, youth unemployment and underemployment remain persistent⁹. Overall unemployment increased from approximately 8.9% in 2019/20 to about 12.3–12.4% by 2024, with the situation more pronounced among young people aged 18–30 having rose from an estimated 10–13% in 2019/20 to 16.1% in 2024¹⁰, underscoring growing pressure on the labour market and limited absorption of new entrants.

Within the renewable energy sector, these challenges are compounded by skills mismatches between the education system and labour market needs, limiting youth employability in technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial roles.

[Renewable Energy Conference 2024 & Expo Report: Transforming Livelihoods Through Clean Energy Access](#)
[Khalifa \(2023\) Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Modern Energy Cooking](#)



Young people also face limited access to start-up capital, incubation services, and mentorship, which constrains youth-led enterprise development. Furthermore, a significant share of renewable energy jobs remains informal, offering limited income stability, social protection, and clear pathways for career progression. Addressing these structural constraints is critical to unlocking the renewable energy sector’s full potential as a driver of decent youth employment and inclusive economic growth.

Across the renewable energy value chain, persistent inclusion gaps remain in policy and planning, financing, market development, and employment. Women and youth continue to face unequal access to decision-making, finance, inclusive business opportunities, and decent work. Addressing these gaps requires a deliberate shift from passive inclusion assumptions toward intentional design of inclusive energy systems and frameworks that embed equity, participation, and opportunity throughout the value chain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutionalise Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion (GYSI) in Energy Governance, whereby a GYSI Unit is established within MEMD with a clear mandate and budget to mainstream inclusion across renewable energy policies and programmes.

The GYSI unit will conduct gender and social inclusion impact assessments for all publicly supported renewable energy projects that require more domains that validate women and youth engagement and empowerment other than ‘time saving’¹¹ to track progress.

Improve Access to Inclusive Financing by developing targeted financing windows for women- and youth-led renewable energy enterprises through public funds, development finance, and blended finance mechanisms. These will be supported by group loans, pay-as-you-go, collateral-free and results-based financing models suited to women and youth.

Integrate renewable energy skills into TVET, apprenticeship, and community training programmes, to expand skills development, with quotas or incentives for women and youth to encourage workforce inclusion. Additionally promote certification and career pathways that enable progression from informal to formal employment.



Support Youth and Women in Development¹² through their local women- and youth-led energy SMEs associations by facilitating incubation programmes, market access support, and public procurement preferences. This will allow these SMEs support themselves beyond government and donor support in the long run. Encourage inclusive business models (e.g., community-owned mini-grids, women-led clean cooking distribution networks).

Strengthen Data monitoring, and accountability with embedded inclusion indicators into national energy monitoring frameworks and performance contracts.



This policy brief analyses the women and youth inclusion in Uganda as a follow-up from the discussions during the Renewable Energy Conference and Expo 2024.

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