



Leveling the playing field:

**NEW DATA ON GAPS &
OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN
IN FIELD ROLES**



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Acknowledgements:

We wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions made by the broader Value for Women team to enable this first-of-its-kind data to be collected and analyzed. Special thanks go to Carlette Chepn'geno, Kriti Barman, Seema Bhatia-Panthaki, Mansi Gupta, Leah Gwatimba, and Asya Troychansky.

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Authors: Yvonne Krywyj, Renée Hunter, Sophia Davis Vijayan, Shoshana Grossman-Crist

Design: Gerardo Meija

Executive summary

Having women in field roles can be crucial for a company to successfully connect with customers. This is because women field staff can often better understand and cater to the needs of women customers. And in settings that explicitly define the roles of, and interactions between, women and men, it is often more culturally acceptable for women to enter homes for demonstrations, installations, and repairs.

However, women are underrepresented in field roles across sectors, including in the distributed renewable energy sector.¹ Barriers to women entering field roles include practical challenges, sociocultural challenges, and the fact that some field roles are not designed to support women's success. These barriers also impact the growth and retention of women who enter these roles.

To access the benefits of having women in field roles, companies can seize the opportunity to foster an attractive and supportive work environment for both women and men. To take action, however, companies need more granular and sex-disaggregated data on the experiences and needs of field staff and the barriers at play.

To this end, between 2022 and 2023, Value for Women conducted a first-of-its-kind survey with 533 field staff across 10 distributed renewable energy (DRE) companies in 4 African countries.

¹ Distributed renewable energy systems are localized systems that generate renewable energy close to where it is used, such as solar home systems and mini-grids. These systems operate independently of a centralized electricity grid, and are particularly important in remote and rural areas with limited or no access to traditional power grids.

This survey revealed notable gender differences among field staff. Key findings were:

1

Women in field roles are less satisfied than men in field roles.

- Notably fewer women than men would recommend working at their organization to a friend or colleague. This is reflected in the Net Promoter Score (NPS)², which is 18 for women field staff, compared to 31 for men.

2

Women field staff are overrepresented in commission-based sales roles, increasing their exposure to financial instability and unpredictable schedules.

- 91% of women are in sales roles, compared to 77% of men.
- 73% of sales roles receive purely commission-based pay, compared to 17% of technical roles.

3

Women field staff are less satisfied with their pay than their men counterparts.

- Women receiving fixed pay are notably less satisfied with their pay than their men counterparts (50% versus 73% are satisfied).
- Field staff receiving commission-based pay – where women are overrepresented – are notably less satisfied with their pay than those on fixed pay (50% of commission-based field staff versus 69% of fixed pay field staff are satisfied).

4

Women are less satisfied with field kits than men, and the terms on which they are provided can put women’s performance at a disadvantage.

- 60% of women are dissatisfied with the provided field kits, compared to 45% of men.

5

Safety concerns exist for a proportion of (women) field staff.

- 13% of all field staff sometimes feel unsafe when interacting with customers.
- 12% of field staff are unaware of whom to contact in case they feel unsafe.
- 10% of field staff do not feel sexual harassment is taken seriously, or that complaints would be investigated and addressed properly.

6

Limited awareness of career growth opportunities undercuts field staff progression, especially for women.

- 38% of women and 31% of men are unaware of possible roles they might grow into.
- This gap is greater for sales roles (where women are overrepresented): 39% of sales field staff indicate they are not aware of potential new roles, compared to 6% of technical field staff.

² Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a gauge of satisfaction and loyalty. Respondents are asked to indicate on a scale of 0-10 “How likely are you to recommend this employer to your friends and family”. The NPS score is calculated by % Promoters (9-10) - % Detractors (0-6), and possible scores range from -100 to 100. Any positive score is good, a score above 20-30 is generally considered above average, above 50 is considered excellent, and a negative score is considered poor.



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While they point to important gender differences that are likely to appear similarly across sectors, this data is not, in the strictest sense, representative of all field staff worldwide. These findings are intended to provide a starting point for interested employers to investigate and take action in their own companies, as experiences may vary between companies and regions.

Companies that wish to attract and retain more women in field roles can do so by first collecting and analyzing their own data from their field staff to identify differences between women and men field agents' experiences. Having this clarity on the most pressing differences, companies can then implement solutions, which may target addressing social norms, ensuring fair compensation, providing adequate field support, enhancing safety measures, or offering professional

development opportunities, for example. We expect that these two steps (which can be relatively light on resource requirements) will increase the satisfaction, engagement, and retention of women in field roles.

Funders can support by offering technical assistance, funding for essential resources, and facilitating peer-sharing networks. Regular surveys funded by these organizations can help companies benchmark progress and improve inclusivity.

By taking these steps, companies can create an inclusive environment that benefits everyone, driving overall success and impact.



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1

Introduction

1.1 About this report

Knowing the business case, employers often seek to increase women’s representation in field roles, but are hampered in their ability to take meaningful action. On the one hand, women face significant barriers entering and thriving in these positions. On the other hand, there is limited quantitative data on the experiences of women field staff and the challenges they face.

To fill this evidence gap on gendered differences in field staff experience, Value for Women embarked on an investigation to gather data from 533 field staff across 10 distributed renewable energy (DRE) firms in 4 African countries. This report presents fresh insights on gendered differences in the experience of field staff, specifically focusing on job-specific factors that might hinder women in accessing and thriving in these roles. To our knowledge, this report represents the first of its kind in dedicated (sex-disaggregated) data on the experience of field staff.

Packed with actionable strategies, this report shows how to design and adapt field roles to attract, retain, and support both women and men, making it an important read for organizations committed to gender equality and organizational success.

**BOX 1:
About this partnership**

This research was undertaken as part of a joint initiative by [Shortlist](#) and [Value for Women](#) under the Women for Green Jobs (W4GJ) program from July 2022 through July 2024, funded by the [Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet](#) (GEAPP). The goal of W4GJ is to ensure that more women are accessing and succeeding in clean energy careers in Africa, specifically targeting job placements, career support, and employer-level interventions across seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

 **Shortlist**

Shortlist is a talent and impact advisory firm that provides recruitment services and technology for both leadership hiring and large-scale workforce innovation programs across African startups, social ventures, and mission-driven organizations. Shortlist Futures team designs and implements youth employment and workforce programs across Africa in partnership with donors, governments, enterprises, and educators. These programs span several sectors including off-grid energy, climate technology, and global digital economy.



Founded by the Rockefeller and Ikea foundations and the Bezos Earth Fund, GEAPP is an alliance of philanthropy, governments, technology, policy, and financing partners working together to support developing countries shift to a clean energy model that ensures universal energy access while enabling the global community to meet critical climate goals during the next decade.



Value for Women is a global pioneer with a mission to promote women's participation and leadership in business, finance, and investment in emerging markets. It does this through building individual leadership, equipping businesses, and driving innovation through data & research. Value for Women is a woman-led company, and its diverse team is spread across 5 continents with expertise in countless sectors.

1.2 Is this report for you?

This report is relevant for:



HR professionals and corporate leaders at medium to large-sized companies with significant field forces; particularly those wishing to increase women's representation in these roles.



NGOs, government bodies, international development agencies, and funders that wish to support initiatives to enhance women's representation –and their experiences– among field staff.

**BOX 2:
Representativeness of data and limitations**

While the collected data points to important gender differences that are likely to appear similarly across sectors, this data is not in the strictest sense representative for all field staff across the globe. These findings are intended to provide a starting point for interested employers to investigate and take action in their own companies, as experiences may vary between companies and regions.

The learnings from this report, however, are relevant starting points for all companies that work with field-based staff– be they sales, distribution, customer service, technical support, or others.



2

Opportunities for increasing women's representation in field roles

Women are underrepresented in field roles across sectors, as attracting and retaining women into these roles remains a significant challenge. When examining the renewable energy sector, an IFC study of 64 DRE companies in 10 African countries found that women in the DRE sector constitute only 31% of sales staff and 13% of staff in technical STEM roles.³ This disparity is not limited to the renewable energy sector. In the agriculture sector, women represent only 27% and 26% of agricultural extension workers in South Africa and Indonesia, respectively.⁴ Women are also underrepresented in field roles in transport and logistics; globally, women represent 36% of postal and courier delivery roles.⁵

Yet these roles promise significant job growth with high earning potential, which women are missing out on.

The rise in off-grid solar home systems and mini-grid sales, for example, has spurred job creation in rural areas beyond the grid's reach.⁶ For instance, Ghana and Senegal could create up to 20,000 direct jobs in renewable energy manufacturing, sales, and operations and maintenance by 2030, predominantly in field roles.⁷ These positions offer higher pay compared to other rural jobs, with studies in Kenya and Nigeria showing unskilled jobs in the sector exceeding average rural incomes.⁸ Other sectors also face a growing demand for field roles. The transport and logistics sector in India alone grew from 7.3 million jobs in 2011 to 25 million jobs in 2022, and a substantial portion of those jobs are based in the field.⁹ **By lowering the barriers that keep women out of these roles, employers can increase women's access to significant and growing economic opportunities.**

3 Energy2Equal Africa. "Women's Participation in the Renewable Energy Workforce in Africa: Identifying Barriers and Opportunities for Women as Leaders and Employees." IFC. 2022. <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/final-report-2-e2e-report-updated-online.pdf>

4 Johnson A. Adebayo. "Women as Extension Advisors." Research Globalization. 2022. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590051X22000211#b0175>

5 Wei-Shiuen Ng and Ashley Acker. "The Gender Dimension of the Transport Workforce." International Transport Forum. 2020. <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/gender-dimension-transport-workforce.pdf>

6 IEA. "World Energy Employment 2023." International Energy Agency. 2023. https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/8934984a-0d66-444f-a36f-641a4a3ef7de/World_Energy_Employment_2023.pdf

7 Alliance for Rural Electrification. "Catalysing Green Rural Job Creation with Decentralised Renewable Energies in West Africa." Alliance for Rural Electrification. 2023. <https://www.ruralelec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Catalysing-Green-Rural-Job-Creation-with-DRE-in-West-Africa.pdf>

8 Power for All. *Powering Jobs Census 2022: The Energy Access Workforce*. Power for All, 2022. <https://www.powerforall.org/application/files/3016/6324/8657/Powering-Jobs-Census-2022-914.pdf>

9 Klaus-Dieter Ruske and Peter Kaushke. "Transportation and Logistics 2030. Volume 5: Winning the Talent Race." PWC. 2022. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/transportation-logistics/pdf/pwc-tl-2030-volume-5.pdf>

And women aren't the only ones missing out: Gender inclusion can contribute to a company's success by enhancing the ability of all field staff to connect with customers and address their needs, especially in culturally sensitive settings. Field-based sales teams that are predominantly made up of men often lack the tools to effectively reach women customers.¹⁰ Hiring women field staff can drive innovation and tap into new customer segments— which is crucial as women make 89% of household purchase decisions¹¹— thus improving business outcomes. In non-sales field roles, women are better positioned to perform duties in situations that may be culturally sensitive, such as a technician entering a customer's home to perform a solar installation.¹²

Barriers to women entering field roles include practical challenges, sociocultural challenges, and the fact that some field roles are not designed to support women's success. These barriers also impact the growth and retention of women who enter these roles.

To access the benefits of having women in field roles, companies can seize the opportunity to foster an attractive and supportive work environment for both women and men. To take action, however, companies need more granular and sex-disaggregated data on the experiences and needs of field staff and the barriers at play, which we will provide in the following section of this report.

BOX 3:
What do we mean when we talk about field staff?

"Field staff" refers to employees or contract workers who perform their duties outside of a traditional office environment. For the context of this report, **"field staff" refers to staff and contract workers who spend 50% or more of their time engaging with clients in locations outside of a fixed office or store.** In the renewable energy sector, this encompasses a wide range of roles crucial in the distribution, installation, operation, and maintenance of the energy products by the end users, most frequently including sales, technical, customer service, and payment/collection roles.



10 Energy2Equal Africa. "Women's Participation in the Renewable Energy Workforce in Africa: Identifying Barriers and Opportunities for Women as Leaders and Employees." IFC. 2022. <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/final-report-2-e2e-report-updated-online.pdf>

11 Ipsos. "African Women' Ipsos Study: Women as Key Drivers of the African Economy." Ipsos. 2017. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-ng/african-women-ipsos-study-women-key-drivers-african-economy>

12 IRENA. "Renewable Energy: A Gender Perspective." IRENA. 2019. <https://www.irena.org/publications/2019/Jan/Renewable-Energy-A-Gender-Perspective>

3

New data: Addressing the lack of information on field staff gender differences



There are many practical steps an employer can take to make their roles more attractive and supportive— for women and men alike. Yet, all too often, companies have a limited understanding of what, exactly, is going on. For example, they do not know which job functions and experiences pose particular challenges for their staff, and whether this affects women more than men. Quite simply: They don't have the data!

Typical employee satisfaction surveys are designed for office-based employees and are not tailored to capture feedback on the unique and gendered experiences of field staff. Due to the nature of their role, field staff have particular experiences and needs that are not shared by their office-based colleagues, such as travel requirements, compensation through commission, the need for specialized field kits, and perceptions of gender inclusion within their companies.

To address these unique experiences, which are usually overlooked by other employee surveys, we designed a dedicated field staff survey— see Box 4 below.

BOX 4: Methodology: Field staff survey

Between September 2023 and February 2024, Value for Women deployed a dedicated survey among 533 field staff (50% women, 50% men)¹³ across 10 renewable energy companies¹⁴ in 4 African countries.¹⁵ Representing a total population of 1103, our survey sample provided a margin of error of 3% at a confidence interval of 95.

The survey was deployed in accordance with each company's own logistical preferences— either as digital or telephonic surveys —to ensure maximum participation regardless of (digital) literacy or access to devices. The goal was to capture the specific

experiences of field staff (whether in sales, distribution, installations, or customer support), and it was sent to all staff who spend over 50% of their time in the field.

Most of the respondents work in sales and are paid on commission. Among the respondents, 91% of women and 77% of men are in sales roles, and 5% of women and 15% of men are in technical roles. 70% of women and 57% of men receive purely commission-based compensation, while the remainder are compensated with fixed salaries or a mix of fixed salary and variable commission.

¹³ Note that overall women's representation in field roles within these individual companies ranges between 10% and 65%.

¹⁴ Companies surveyed were: African Clean Energy, Ampersand, Deevabits, EnerGrow, Equatorial Power, Koolboks, Mwangaza Light, Nazava Water Filters, Nyalore Impact, and Sistema.bio.

¹⁵ Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda

SURVEY THEMES



Staff demographics, including role types and compensation models

Gender representation across different field staff types and characteristics



Satisfaction

Overall satisfaction with the company and compensation



Field Support

Extent to which field staff feel adequately equipped with the knowledge, skills and field kits needed for their work



Safety and security

Perceptions of safety while traveling, interacting with customers, and awareness of recourse mechanisms in the event of a safety incident or harassment



Professional development and work culture

Satisfaction with training initiatives and awareness of potential career paths within the company, and relationships with colleagues



Personal and organizational values

Perceptions of women's suitability for certain roles, and views on the importance of a gender-diverse workforce

Please note: Some questions were not asked to all respondents due to small survey changes for specific companies. As a result, the sample is slightly smaller for certain questions.



FINDING 1:

Women in field roles are less satisfied than men in field roles

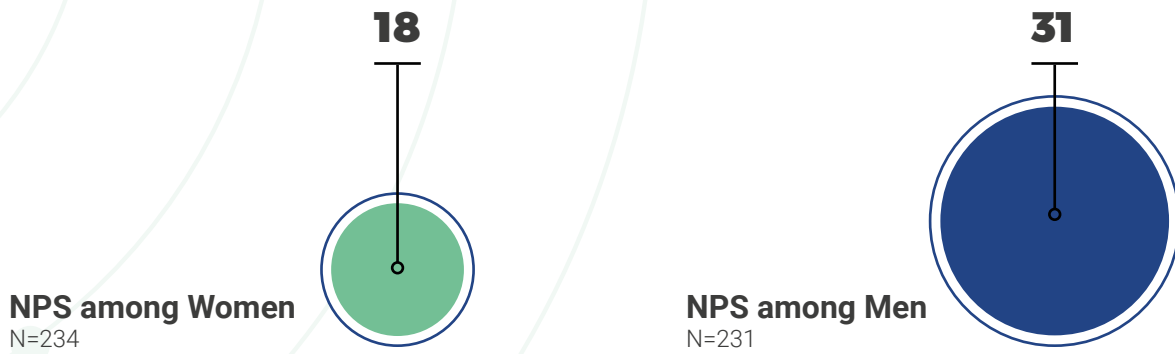
Notably fewer women than men would recommend working at their organization to a friend or colleague. This is reflected in the Net Promoter Score (NPS)¹⁶, which is 18 for women field staff, compared to 31 for men. (see Figure 1). This is a gauge of satisfaction and loyalty where any score above 0 is good and a score a score between 20-30 is generally considered above average. The substantial difference in overall satisfaction and loyalty hints at structural challenges for women field staff, negatively impacting their growth and long-term retention. Reinforcing this finding, a study with 1,200 women in the energy sector showed that 55% planned to switch sectors soon, with this inclination being 15% more prevalent among women with children.¹⁷

This highlights the need to investigate how to improve field roles for women to increase satisfaction and, ultimately, performance and retention.

¹⁶ Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a gauge of satisfaction and loyalty. Respondents are asked to indicate on a scale of 0-10 "How likely are you to recommend this employer to your friends and family". The NPS score is calculated by % Promoters (9-10) - %, Detractors (0-6), and possible scores range from -100 to 100. Any positive score is good, a score between 20-30 is generally considered above average, above 50 is considered excellent, and a negative score is considered poor.

¹⁷ NES Fircroft. "The Women in Energy Global Study. 2018." NES Fircroft <https://www.theogtc.com/media/2411/woman-in-energy-globalstudy.pdf>

FIGURE 1: Net Promoter Score among field staff, by gender



FINDING 2:

Women field staff are overrepresented in commission-based sales roles, increasing their exposure to financial instability and unpredictable schedules

Our survey showed that women field staff are almost exclusively in commission-based sales roles, compared to a greater variety among men. Among the respondents, 91% of women, compared to 77% of men, are in sales roles, whereas only 5% of women, compared to 15% of men, are in technical roles (like Technician or Installer) (see Figure 2). The lack of women with relevant educational backgrounds partially explains this role segregation: Practically, women are underrepresented in STEM fields¹⁸, which limits the pool of qualified women candidates for roles in installations or technical support. Further, prevailing social norms and perceptions can create a vicious cycle where low representation of women reinforces the assumption that such roles are unsuitable or unattractive to them (*read more in Finding 6*).



“Our [sales] workforce is majority women because we believe they have a higher persuasion rate.”

HR Assistant, Mwangaza Light

These sales roles are much more likely than other roles to receive purely commission-based pay, and consequently, women are more likely than men to work purely for commission. This leaves women in field roles more exposed to financial instability.

73% of sales roles are purely commission-based, compared to 17% of technical roles (see Figure 2). It should then come as no surprise that 70% of women, compared to 57% of men, receive purely commission-based compensation (see Figure 3).

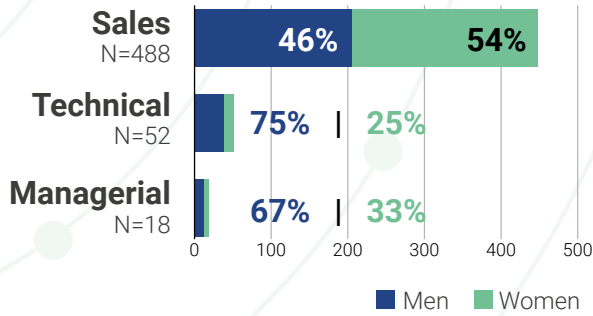


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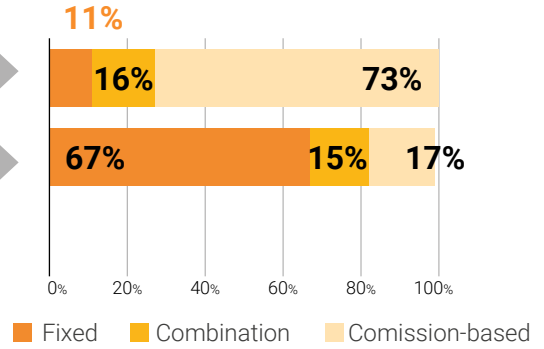
¹⁸ Elaine Unterhalter et al. “Women’s Participation in higher education in Southern Africa: an exploration of STEM, leadership and enrolment in institutions in Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.” UNESCO. 2024. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389674.locale=en>

FIGURE 2: Gender representation and compensation model across field role types

Gender representation

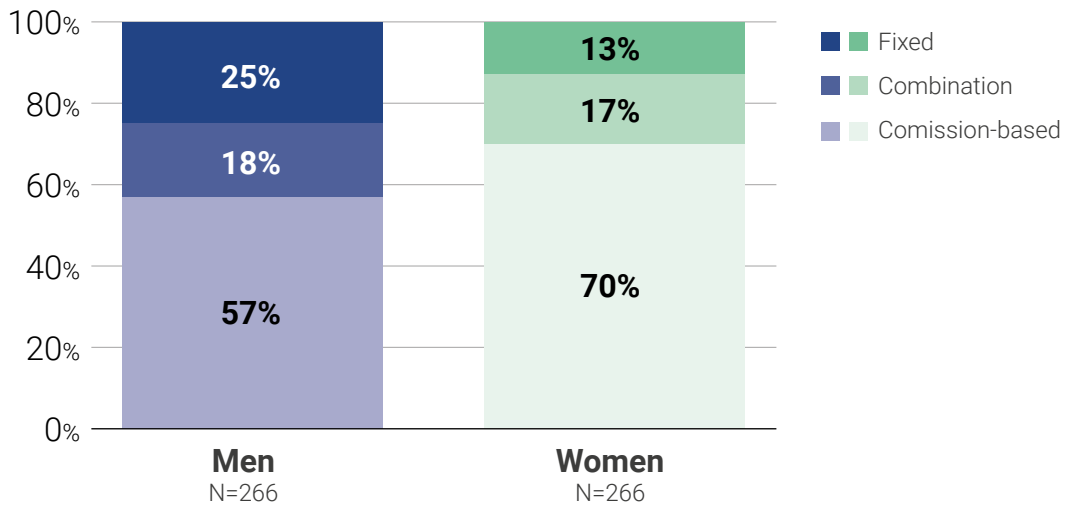


Compensation model



Number of respondents (N)

FIGURE 3: Compensation model by gender





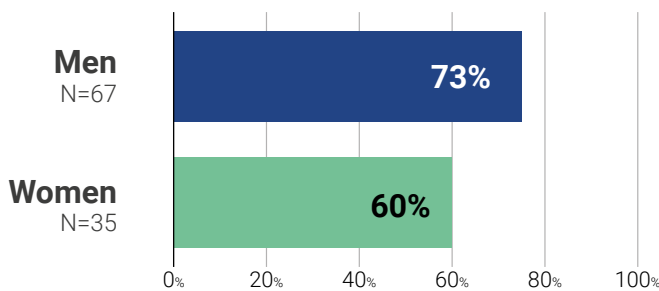
FINDING 3:

Women field staff are less satisfied with their pay than their men counterparts

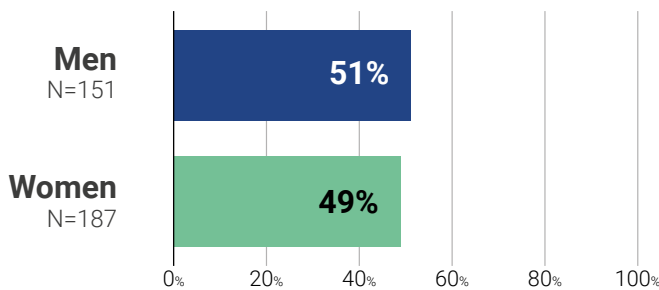
Overall, field staff report varying levels of satisfaction with their compensation, with only about half expressing satisfaction. Women, in particular, express less satisfaction than men in two ways: On the one hand, women in fixed-pay roles show more pronounced dissatisfaction with their pay than men: only 60% of women in fixed-pay are satisfied compared to 73% of men. This aligns with data on gender income gaps in the sector, as globally, women in the energy sector earn 15% less than men, even with comparable skills.¹⁹ On the other hand, pay satisfaction is markedly lower among commission-based staff (50%) compared to those on fixed pay (69%), and women are overrepresented in these roles.

FIGURE 4: Satisfaction with payments, by compensation model, by gender

Fixed Pay



Commission-Based



BOX 5:

Payment structures among the surveyed employers

Commission-based pay structures dominate field roles in the surveyed companies:

7 of the 10 surveyed employers pay some or all of their field staff on commission only. 3 of those companies also pay their high-performing field staff bonuses or provide them with the opportunity to move into a fixed salary structure. These incentives can help high-performing field staff earn additional or more stable income, improving their livelihoods. However, such a structure can also place commission-based field staff in financial vulnerability if their sales are low, creating a vicious cycle and increasing the income gap. This highlights the need to structure commission-based field roles to provide adequate support for all—especially women—to succeed and earn a decent livelihood.

It should be noted: In the distributed renewable energy (DRE) sector, where we conducted this research, the environment is highly competitive, dynamic and often resource-constrained. This means commission-based payment structures are often the most feasible method for onboarding a large staff contingent. Employers use various performance-based bonuses and other financial incentives to encourage and reward success among their staff. Our aim is not to advocate against hiring staff, including women, into commission-based roles at all. Instead, we aim to highlight the gender income gaps that are emerging, and to provide suggestions to address these disparities.

¹⁹ International Energy Agency. "Understanding Gender Gaps in Wages, Employment, and Career Trajectories in the Energy Sector." IEA. 2022. <https://www.iea.org/articles/understanding-gender-gaps-in-wages-employment-and-career-trajectories-in-the-energy-sector>



FINDING 4:

Women are less satisfied with field kits than men, and the terms on which they are provided can put women’s performance at a disadvantage

Field kits are essential for field staff to perform well, but women are less satisfied with these kits than men. Only 29% of women, compared to 41% of men, reported satisfaction with their field kits (see Figure 5).

Most surveyed employers provide demonstration kits, marketing materials and uniforms to all field staff free of charge.²⁰

They also commonly provide transportation stipends, airtime and high-visibility gear - while rain gear or vehicles are rarely provided. Among the 10 surveyed companies, 1 requires staff to finance their own kits, while 3 others only provide uniforms, rain gear, or high-visibility gear to staff who achieve targets or attend certain company events. Additionally, 5 companies expect staff to organize and pay for their own field transportation (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 5: Satisfaction with provided field kits, by gender

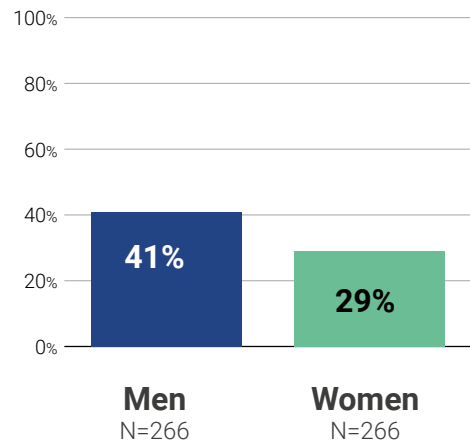
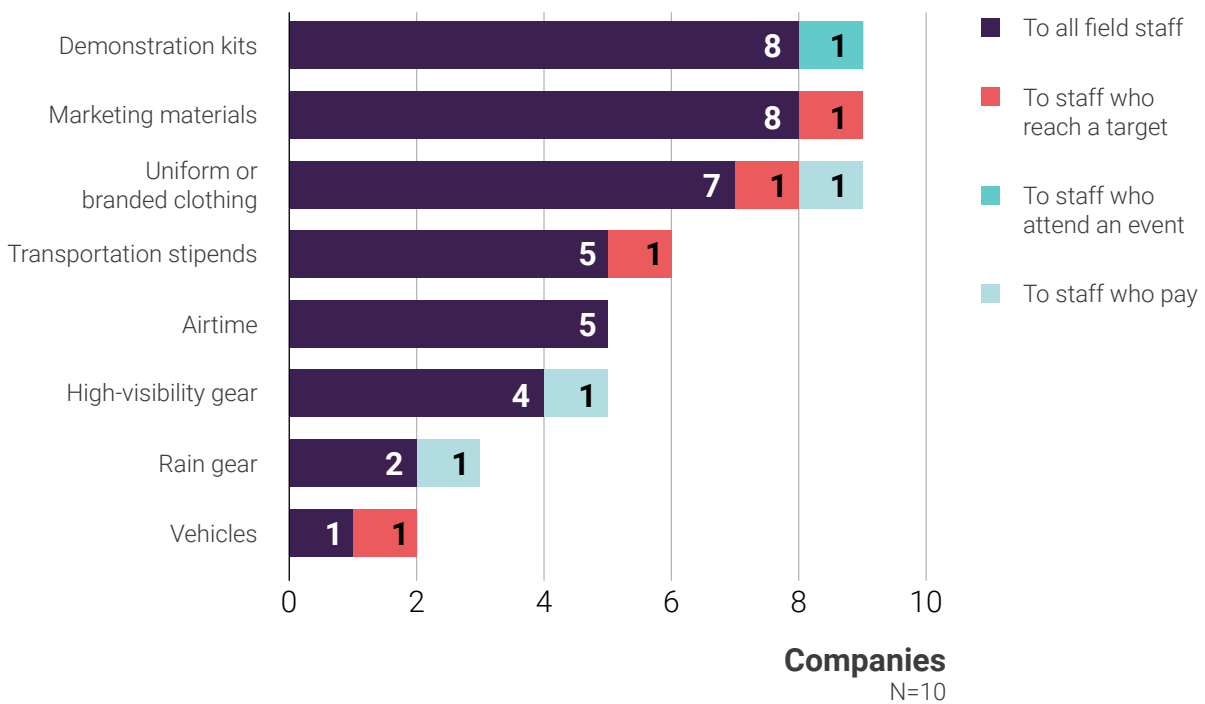


FIGURE 6: Field kit provision among the surveyed employers



²⁰ Please note: Among the 10 surveyed companies, 1 did not provide us any information about the type of field kits provided to their field staff.

The surveyed employers acknowledge that field kits may not meet their staff's needs, especially women. Requiring staff to self-finance materials, or travel daily to pick them up, may disproportionately affect women, impacting their performance and earning potential. Surveyed companies specifically noted that women face challenges in picking up and dropping off demonstration kits at storage locations on a daily basis. As mentioned, women in commission-based roles report lower pay satisfaction (see Figure 4), limiting their funds for essentials like demonstration kits and transportation. Without support for travel or demonstration materials, women may struggle to increase their sales, resulting in lower commissions.²¹

“Sometimes it’s tough. In some months, you go even without selling a single sale, and when that arises, you are unable to proceed to the next month because of transport challenges.”

- **Woman field staff, Sistema.bio**

“It would improve my experience if we were supported with the addition of logistics, money for transport and communication.”

- **Woman field staff, Sistema.bio**

“We have some branches in remote areas, it can take time to deliver kits to them, and sometimes, the requirements for kits vary according to the [rainy or dry] seasons.”

HR manager, EnerGrow

Through the survey, field staff highlighted the need for additional items in their field kits, particularly due to transportation costs and challenging weather conditions. The most commonly requested items (with no notable gender differences) were:

- 1. New or increased transport allowances (requested at 9 of 10 companies);**
- 2. Rain gear (requested at 6 of 10 companies); and**
- 3. Uniforms or company ID cards (requested at 4 of 10 companies).**

Providing such support can significantly benefit employers, as seen with a renewable energy company in India, which saw their women agents achieve a 56% sales increase as a result of equipping them with fully-funded demonstration kits.²²



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21 Energy2Equal. 2002. “Women’s Participation in the Renewable Energy Workforce in Africa: Identifying Barriers and Opportunities for Women as Leaders and Employees.” IFC. <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/final-report-2-e2e-report-updated-online.pdf>

22 Value for Women. “A Business-First Approach to Gender Inclusion: How to Think about Gender Inclusion in Small and Medium Enterprise Operations.” Value for Women. 2018. <https://www.v4w.org/resources/a-business-first-approach-to-gender-inclusion>



FINDING 5:

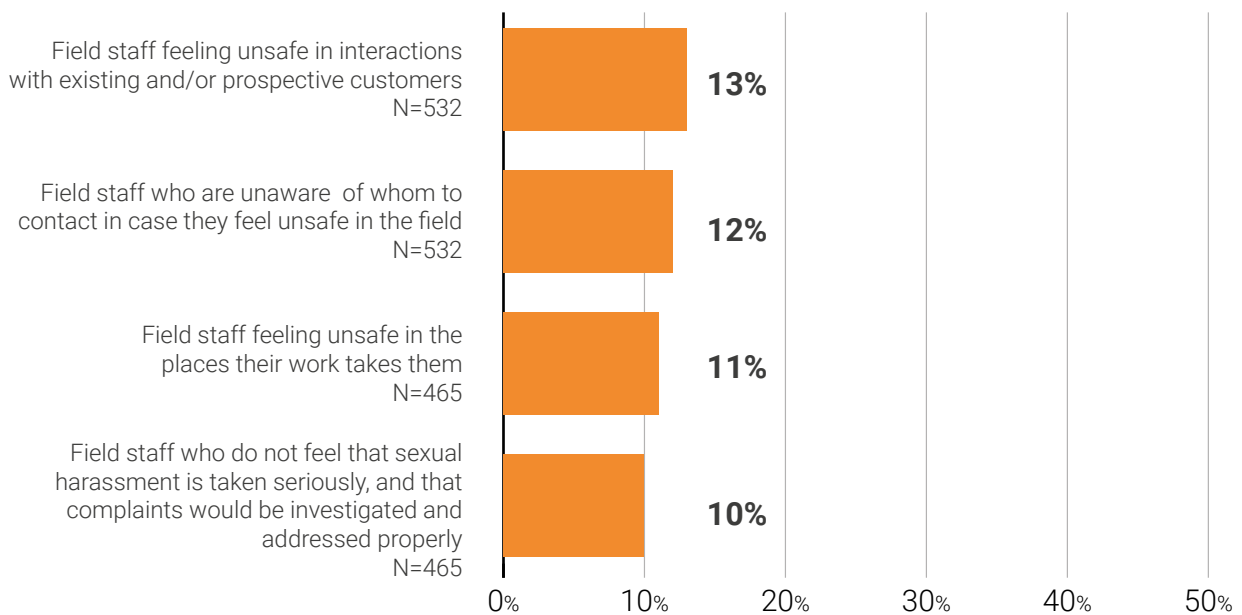
Safety concerns exist for a proportion of (women) field staff

Safety is a significant concern for field staff, especially women. Field roles often require solitary travel through sparsely populated areas, or overnight stays in unfamiliar locations, which generates safety concerns. Additionally, men-dominated sectors often lack women-friendly facilities, such as separate washrooms, changing rooms, or additional safety vetting for overnight stays.^{23, 24}

The survey found that 11% of all respondents felt unsafe at the locations where their work takes them. Additionally, 15% of women and 13% of men do feel safe interacting with existing or prospective customers²⁵ (see Figure 7).

Many companies have reporting measures and recourse mechanisms for safety incidents, but some staff are unaware of the procedures or whether these procedures cover field staff. In some cases, in fact, these policies only apply to full-time employees, and exclude commission-based field staff. Although all surveyed employers have anti-harassment protocols,²⁶ 12% of field staff respondents are unaware of whom to contact when they feel unsafe in the field. Furthermore, 10% do *not* agree that sexual harassment is taken seriously at the company.

FIGURE 7: Safety concerns among field staff (both women and men)



23 RES4Africa Foundation "A Just Transition or Just a Transition: Making the Case for Women in Energy." RES4Africa Foundation. 2024. <https://res4africa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/RES4Africa-Women-in-Energy-Report-2024.pdf>

24 Elizabeth Mayer et al. "Toward More and Better Jobs for Women in Energy: An Assessment Undertaken to Guide the New Regional Network in Energy for Women in the Middle East and North Africa." World Bank. 2022. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/09981130622220953/pdf/IDU0864241720fd0f04d5a094d009ba1a46de97d.pdf>

25 See also Value for Women. "Strengthening the Safety Net: Anti-Sexual Harassment Procedures Removing Barriers to Women's Workforce Participation." Value for Women. 2024. <https://www.v4w.org/resources/case-study-strengthening-the-safety-net>

26 As gathered through the Value for Women Gender Smart Nexus Enterprise Gender Inclusion Self-Assessment Survey - an assessment of organizational policies and practices conducted with all employers at the outset of the Women 4 Green Jobs program.

Field staff's feedback indicates that field kits play a role in safeguarding field staff security. For instance, twice as many women as men requested field kits to include uniforms that clearly identify them as employees, which can help prevent harassment. Without clear identification or safe transport, women face increased safety risks while performing their duties, including violence and traffic accidents.

“We should be provided with aprons. We also need uniforms for the community to recognize us.”

- Woman field staff, Mwangaza Light



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FINDING 6: Limited awareness of career growth opportunities undercuts field staff progression, especially for women

Field staff are dissatisfied with the available learning and growth opportunities. Overall, 26% of respondents are not satisfied with the learning and growth opportunities, and 16% are not satisfied with the ongoing training for their current roles.

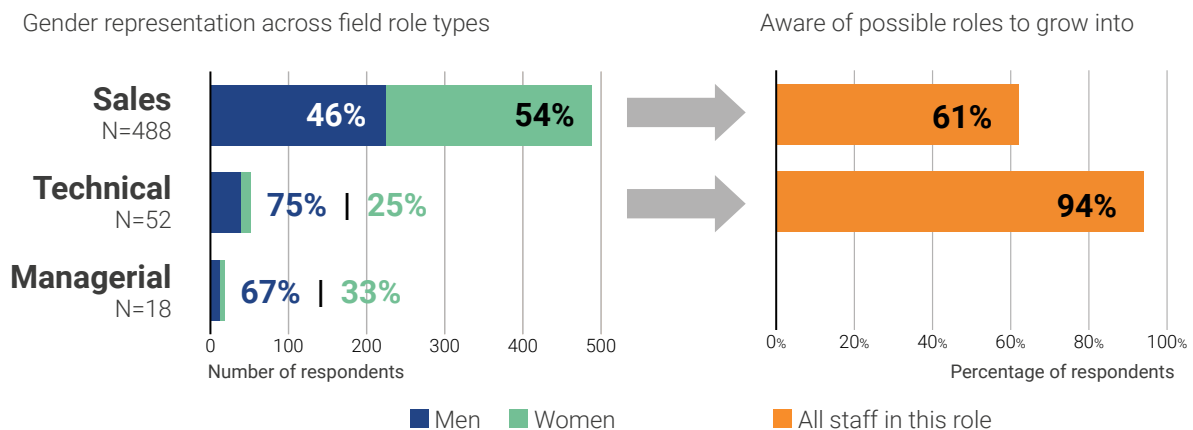
This is compounded by a significant portion of field staff (especially women) being unaware of growth opportunities.

38% of women and 31% of men field staff do not know about potential new roles, and approximately one-third of respondents

indicate they are not informed when new suitable vacancies open up internally.

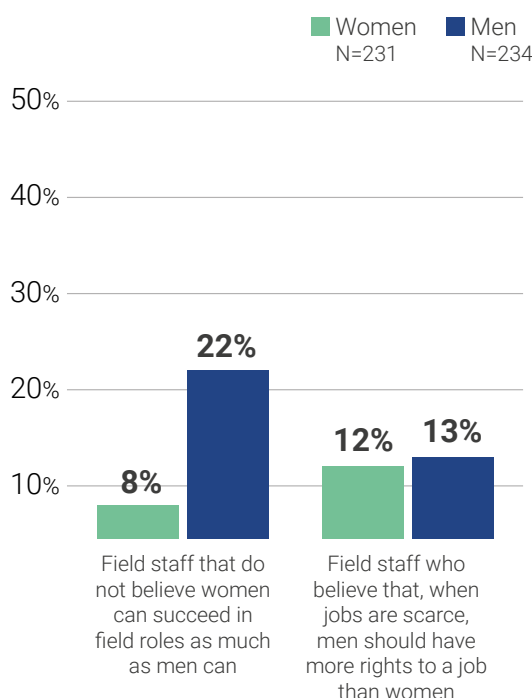
Women, who are disproportionately represented in commission-based sales roles, are particularly affected by this lack of awareness. 38% of sales staff, compared to only 6% of technical staff, indicate they are unaware of potential new roles (see Figure 8). This lack of awareness hinders career progression from commission-based field roles to higher-paying, more stable positions.

FIGURE 8: Awareness of possible roles to grow into, by role type



Prevailing social norms mean that many, both women and men, believe that women shouldn't occupy certain positions, leading to bias in promotion decisions. The survey results show that gender biases are present among a sizable portion of field staff: Between 8% of women and 22% of men do *not* agree that women can succeed in field-based roles as much as men. Additionally, around 12% of both women and men believe that men should have more right to a job when jobs are scarce (see Figure 9).²⁷ Research from the International Renewable Energy Agency highlights that gender perceptions, such as women being less adept at physically demanding tasks or having too many care responsibilities,²⁸ perpetuate biases in promotion processes. This creates a vicious cycle where low representation of women reinforces the assumption that such roles are unsuitable or unattractive to them.²⁹ This is particularly concerning, given that overall, among surveyed employers, women make up only 38% of middle management roles.^{30, 31}

FIGURE 9: Sociocultural norms held by field staff



The good news is that this vicious cycle can be reversed: The introduction of women into traditionally men-dominated roles can be effective in rapidly changing such limiting beliefs.³²

“I am concerned about the perspective that men are more entitled to jobs than women when jobs are scarce. This is very surprising.”

– Gender, Monitoring, and Evaluation Officer, Nyalore Impact

“Recently we had an intern who was a lady that could perform anything the men did, whether it was climbing, handling all electricals inside a customer’s house. She could perform everything just as well as the men or better.”

– Senior Technician, KPEA

27 This question is similarly included in the [World Values Survey](#), a series of nationally representative surveys conducted on a regular basis. Average responses for 2022 in the countries in which our survey was conducted:

Kenya: 30% of women, 44% of men agree

Nigeria: 55% of women, 74% of men agree

No survey data available for Rwanda or Uganda.

28 IRENA. 2019. “Renewable Energy: A Gender Perspective.” <https://www.irena.org/publications/2019/Jan/Renewable-Energy-A-Gender-Perspective>

29 See also Value for Women. “Redefining Roles: Shifting Perceptions of Suitability to Increase Women’s Representation in Men-Dominated Jobs.” Value for Women. 2024. <https://www.v4w.org/resources/case-study-redefining-roles>

30 While these numbers are better than in the sector at large, where women make up only 26% of managers and 30% of CEOs, they are still concerning because employers self-selected into this research program. This means that these employers had a pre-existing interest in increasing their levels of gender inclusion. This may explain why these employers had slightly higher levels of women’s representation in senior management than generally observed in the sector.

31 Energy2Equal. 2022. “Women’s Participation in the Renewable Energy Workforce in Africa: Identifying Barriers and Opportunities for Women as Leaders and Employees.” IFC. <https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/final-report-2-e2e-report-updated-online.pdf>

32 See also Value for Women. “Redefining Roles: Shifting Perceptions of Suitability to Increase Women’s Representation in Men-Dominated Jobs.” Value for Women. 2024. <https://www.v4w.org/resources/case-study-redefining-roles>



4

Making field roles work for women: Considerations for employers

Our survey results show a clear gap in satisfaction between women and men in field roles (with the NPS for women at 18, compared to 31 for men). Likely reasons for this include differences in role types, pay structure, field kit provision, safety measures, and growth opportunities.

Companies can address these issues with practical changes to make field roles more accessible and supportive for women.

4.1 Inspiration from participating employers

Several companies that participated in this initiative have already begun addressing gendered differences identified in their results. Below you'll find mini case studies from these companies, showcasing practical changes made to close gender differences, and their early results.

MINI CASE STUDY 1:

Nazava Water Filters - Addressing gender satisfaction differences with new payment structures

Nazava Water Filters, a water filter company operating in Kenya, surveyed 26 of its 40 field-based sales staff and discovered a substantial gender gap in satisfaction with commission payments: Only 43% of women were satisfied with their pay compared to 75% of men.

In response, Nazava introduced a new “Safe Water Expert” (SWE) sales role in May 2024, offering a fixed salary and allowances for travel and airtime.

6 women and 4 men were promoted to this role, representing 38% of all field staff. This clearly shows the desirability of this more financially stable role.

While it is too early to assess the impact on field staff satisfaction, Nazava has taken a significant step by inviting the SWEs to participate in company annual meetings. This marks the first time field sales staff at Nazava will have the opportunity to participate in this meeting and share their feedback in a company-wide setting.



© Nazava Website



© Africa Clean Energy Website

MINI CASE STUDY 2:

African Clean Energy - Adding route planning to increase field staff safety and efficiency

African Clean Energy (ACE), a company selling improved cookstoves in Uganda, aimed to increase satisfaction and retention among its women field staff. A survey revealed two key factors affecting women field staff’s satisfaction:

1. Harassment and hostility from customers; and
2. Limited or delayed travel allowances, which hindered their ability to cover wide geographical regions and reach remote clients.

To address this, ACE initiated a route planning pilot.

During this pilot, management hosts collaborative planning sessions where field staff communicate specific concerns about existing routes. These sessions aim to crowdsource and design new, safer, travel routes, reducing the need for women to travel alone through unsafe areas and minimizing back-and-forth travel on limited allowances.

While still in the early stages and lacking impact data, the route planning pilot directly addresses the issues raised by ACE’s women field staff, with expected positive outcomes.



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FOR MORE DETAILS, PLEASE REFER TO THE FULL CASE STUDY ON DEEVABITS'S JOURNEY:

"Strengthening the Safety Net: Anti-Sexual Harassment Procedures Removing Barriers to Women's Workforce Participation"



MINI CASE STUDY 3:

Deevabits - Improving field staff safety through anti-sexual harassment procedures

Deevabits, a company distributing and financing energy products to rural customers, faced challenges in attracting and retaining women field staff³³ due to safety concerns associated with extensive travel. A survey of 211 field staff revealed that 16% of women and 8% of men did not feel safe when engaging customers, and 10% of women and 7% of men were unaware of whom to contact if they felt unsafe.

To address these issues, Deevabits:

1. **Strengthened its anti-sexual harassment policy to cover field staff and their specific risks;**
2. **Established and trained an inaugural anti-sexual harassment committee** with the necessary technical knowledge and skills to prevent incidents and manage complaints; and
3. **Raised awareness on workplace safety and harassment prevention** by adapting and translating the training modules provided by Value for Women across all organizational levels.

A follow-up survey showed significant improvements, and closed a number of gender differences that had been observed upon baseline (see Figure 10):

- A 122% increase in women field staff knowing whom to contact in case of safety issues;

- More than double the proportion of women field staff strongly agreeing that disrespectful jokes are not tolerated;
- Over 4 times the proportion of women field staff strongly agreeing they can give feedback to managers without reprisals; and
- More than double the proportion of women field staff feeling respected by colleagues.

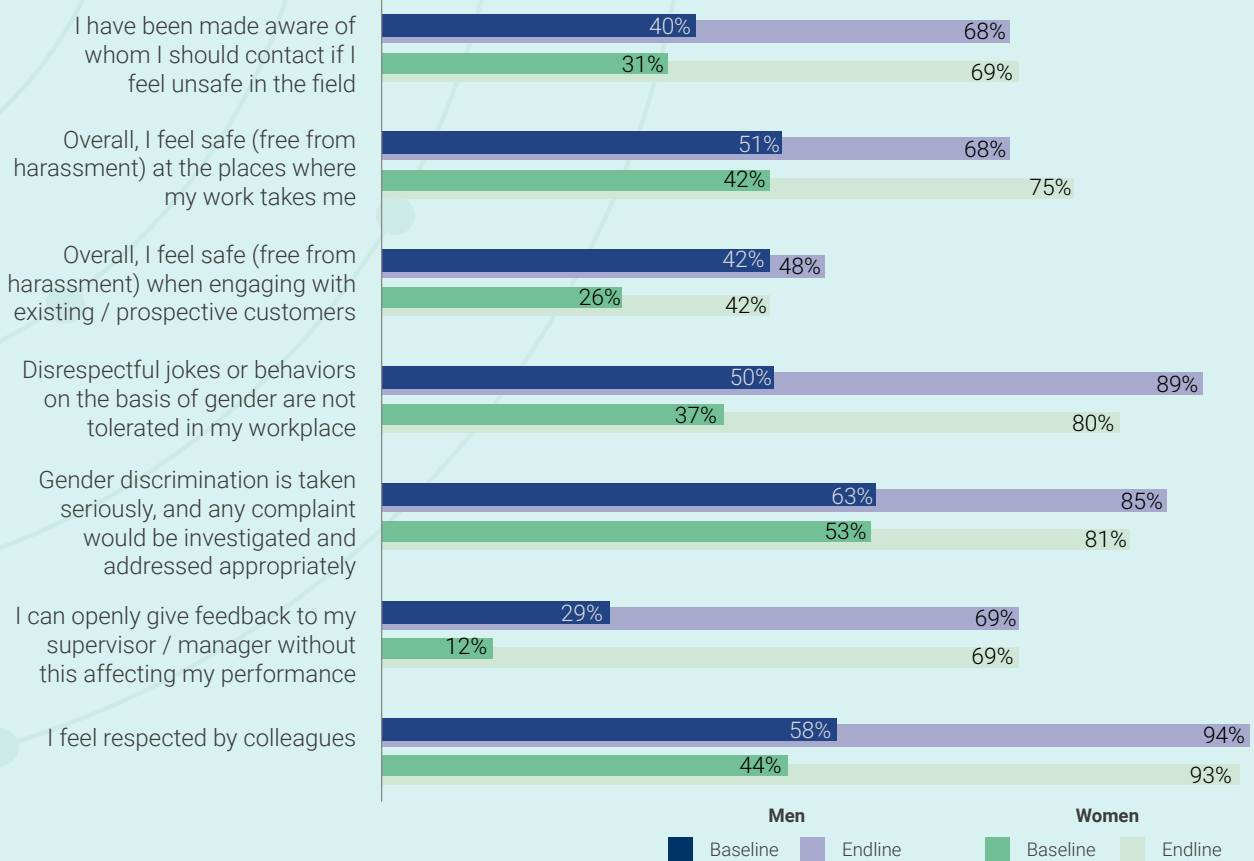
These changes resulted in increased awareness and a greater sense of safety. Additionally, there was a notable increase in feelings of support and respect among colleagues, as well as between colleagues and managers– which was an unintended additional positive consequence of this work.

"All the team's communication with the customers is different since the training. It is different because before, you would find that customers may be talking [about] some things to customer care which are not required [in the working relationship], like "you have a nice voice, can I meet you, can I have your number"...and now the customer care [team member] tells the customer "we are doing work and I am helping you as my customer, nothing else. You cannot talk about something different apart from the work we are doing."

- Area Sales Manager, Deevabits

³³ Please note that Deevabits refers to its field-based sales agents as village social entrepreneurs (VSEs). In this case study, for clarity we refer to them as "field staff".

FIGURE 10: Increase in respondents that strongly agree with the following statements, between baseline and endline³⁴



MINI CASE STUDY 4:

Sistema.bio - Clarifying advancement and facilitating staff welfare

Sistema.bio, a biodigester company operating in Kenya, surveyed its 126 field staff and discovered that 1 in 4 respondents were unaware of new roles opening up in the organization. Additionally, nearly 40% of women (compared to 19% of men) felt that Sistema.bio did not make provisions for working parents and caregivers.

To address this, Sistema.bio:

- 1. Improved communications:** They began sharing new internal job openings in company WhatsApp groups and other platforms accessible in low-data contexts, ensuring field staff could easily access this information.
- 2. Staff welfare group:** They created a staff welfare group to support employees during family and medical events such as births, illness, bereavement, and weddings.

These actions have increased employee satisfaction and engagement among Sistema.bio’s field staff.



© Sistema.Bio

“We have seen most of [the field staff] expressing interest in applying for new roles... This has really helped improve their level of engagement.”

- HR Manager, Sistema.bio

³⁴ The baseline assessment (August 2023) was completed by 210 field staff (92 men and 118 women), and the endline assessment (June 2024) was completed by 153 field staff (62 men and 91 women).



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FOR MORE DETAILS, PLEASE REFER TO THE FULL CASE STUDY ON KPEA'S JOURNEY:

"Redefining roles: Shifting perceptions of suitability to increase women's representation in men-dominated jobs."



MINI CASE STUDY 5:

Kudura Power East Africa - Shifting gender norms internally and externally

Kudura Power East Africa, a mini-grid company operating in western Kenya, aimed to increase women's representation in field roles from 0 to 50%. The company faced a lack of applications from women, influenced by community social norms and internal staff perceptions that women were not interested in these roles. A community survey³⁵ revealed the main barrier to women in local communities applying was a lack of awareness about what these roles entail, reinforcing the belief that they were "probably not suitable" for women.

To address this, KPEA:

1. **Provided detailed descriptions of open roles and explicitly encouraged women to apply at community meetings;**
2. **Standardized its recruitment practices to reduce the risk of bias;** and
3. **Conducted gender awareness training to sensitize** employees around women's suitability for field roles.

As a result, KPEA hired a woman technical intern, shortlisted 2 women for a technical engagement manager role, and saw increased interest from women in the community for future roles.



"So far we have had 2 community meetings after having the training – which was an eye-opener for us. In terms of sensitizing the community – you could see just the faces being lit – "Oh, it's not for men only" – that was the perception we got. After we even got people asking, "So even my daughter can do this job?"

– County Business Manager, KPEA

³⁵ KPEA conducted a community survey in November 2023 among 47 men and 45 women in Busia County. The survey's objective was to understand social and cultural norms as well as perceptions that might deter women from applying for field and technical role

4.2 Considerations for designing and adapting field roles to support both women and men

To attract and retain more women in field roles, companies should first collect data from their field staff to identify gender-specific differences. Data collection doesn't have to be complex. It can be collected through surveys or focus groups or by analyzing pre-existing data— and making sure to analyze for women and men. Indicators might include net promoter score, take-home pay, satisfaction in field support, safety incidents reported, and awareness of new job opportunities. This is essential as field staff are often overlooked by traditional employee engagement surveys, creating a blind spot for employers in receiving feedback from their field staff. For many of our 10 participating companies, the field staff survey run by Value for Women was the first time they asked dedicated questions of their field staff, leading to eye-opening results.

“The NPS was surprising. The results on company culture were a big surprise, and we cultivated it as much as possible. From the responses, we have more work to do.”

– HR manager, EnerGrow

When collecting data, it's important for companies to choose a method that field staff can easily access and that allows them to share openly. For instance, if using surveys, consider whether they should be online, enumerator-led, or paper-based, and whether they need translation for local languages. Clear communication of the data collection's purpose, anonymity, and confidentiality of results is essential to build trust and ensure accessibility among field staff.

If the data identifies any gender disparities, companies can take action to provide better support for both women and men.

On the next page, we include examples of practical actions companies can take depending on the identified gender difference(s).



© EnerGrow website

EXAMPLES OF PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS TO PROVIDE BETTER SUPPORT FOR WOMEN AND MEN



Compensation

- **Where differences in earnings between women and men are identified, investigate and address possible barriers** to women's success (i.e., lack of transportation stipends, limited access to demonstration kits, limited availability of virtual or physical marketing materials, etc.).
- **Increase transparency and awareness of pay and commission calculations**, to ensure field staff are aware of how their compensation is determined (i.e., provide both the percentage and model for how the commission, and if there is a change to the commission structure, ensure it's highlighted on all company communication channels).



Field support

- **Ensure gender-inclusive design for field kits**, for example considering women's and men's physiques and working conditions (i.e., climbing ladders, riding motorbikes, or seasonal weather patterns).
- **Reconsider performance-based access to field kits**, ensuring everyone has the resources needed to effectively engage customers.
- **Ensure there is a nearby, convenient and safe location** where field staff can access and return demo kits daily.
- **Support field staff's travel requirements** through structures such as: fixed travel allowances, benchmarked against current costs of safe transportation for all field staff; travel allowances for field staff who have worked at the company for a fixed amount of time; company vehicles and financing or in-kind support for field staff to learn how to operate them and obtain licenses; or company vehicles and drivers.



Safety and security

- **Implement a dedicated safety hotline** for field staff managed internally or by an third-party provider.
- **Ensure company safety policies and procedures explicitly cover field staff** and interactions with customers (such as anti-sexual harassment policies that cover customer interactions, safe route planning, traveling in pairs to new locations, and not visiting a customer's house during certain hours/evenings).
- **Explicitly include clear examples and exercises from field staff's day-to-day reality** in policy documents and training to help staff understand what is considered harassment and recognize examples of unacceptable behavior (for example, how to respond to a customer saying, "I like your voice, can we meet for coffee?" or "Honey, you look beautiful today.") The goal is for staff to feel increasingly supported in reporting and seeking help for all forms of harassment, including minor incidents, and to raise colleagues' awareness of unacceptable behavior, equipping them to intervene when necessary.



Professional development

- **Establish standardized professional development** process and paths that apply to field staff and office staff alike.
- **Regularly raise awareness about job openings** within the company and encourage field staff to apply.



Social norms

- **Communicate your commitment to gender inclusion to staff, recruiters, job seekers, and community members by ensuring all language promotes the equal participation of women and men.**
- **Set targets** for increasing the number of women in men-dominated roles.
- **Showcase women role models in internal and external communication materials** (i.e., company newsletters and blogs, promotional videos, and community events), highlighting their success in men-dominated roles or growth as a sales agent.
- **Implement bias and sensitivity training for all employees, including leadership and field staff**, and equip internal gender champion to lead conversations about gendered perceptions and beliefs (such as asking staff to describe a typical woman or man customer and identifying stereotypes in the description).



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5

Conclusion

This report has highlighted significant gender differences in the experiences and satisfaction of field staff, offering practical approaches for companies to address these disparities. In sectors where field staff represent the majority of job opportunities, ensuring these roles benefit both women and men equally is crucial. This not only promotes gender equality but also enhances overall company performance.

We urge companies to take action using the practical considerations outlined in this report. The focus should always be on changing the system, not the individual. Employers have a responsibility to create a workplace that supports all staff, ensuring no one is left behind, including women in the field.

Furthermore, funders have a vital role to play in supporting companies to create more inclusive field roles. They can provide technical assistance to help companies understand and implement inclusive practices. Offering funding for salaries, commissions,

field allowances, and providing essential field kits and vehicles can make a significant difference. Funders can also facilitate peer-sharing networks, enabling companies to learn from each other's successes in creating decent and inclusive jobs. Regular, widespread field staff surveys funded by these organizations can help companies benchmark their progress and identify areas for improvement.

By collectively taking these steps, companies can foster an inclusive environment that drives success for everyone.