



CASE STUDY

Kudura Power East Africa



RENEWABLE ENERGY



SME



KENYA

REDEFINING ROLES:

Shifting perceptions of suitability to increase women’s representation in men-dominated jobs

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Introduction

1.1 Is this case study for you?

This case study describes how Kudura Power East Africa (KPEA) successfully changed people’s views on women working in field-based and technical jobs. It shows strategies to reduce hiring biases and attract more women to apply for such roles, and any other roles typically seen as unsuitable for women.



This case study is relevant for:



HR professionals and corporate leaders at medium to large-sized companies looking to employ (more) women in roles that might traditionally be considered unsuitable for women candidates– such as technical or field-based roles.



NGOs, government bodies, international development agencies, and funders who wish to support initiatives aimed at shifting the perceptions that are prohibiting women from entering into roles traditionally considered less suitable for them.

While the case study includes examples specific to technical and field roles in the distributed renewable energy (DRE) sector, **its lessons are relevant across various sectors for organizations seeking to increase women’s representation in traditionally masculine roles.**



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We trust that this case study will effectively illustrate how making small, purposeful efforts can enhance gender inclusion and initiate the shift of social and gender norms.

1.2 High potential, high barriers: On women’s workforce representation in a men-dominated sector

The DRE sector plays a vital role in job creation, especially in emerging and developing economies:

Globally, employment in renewable energy reached approximately 13.7 million jobs in 2022.^{1,2}

Despite this, and in line with broader trends in renewable energy employment, **women’s representation in the DRE sector remains low.** Women make up only 32% of the global renewable energy workforce and an even smaller percentage of technical roles.³

Women’s representation in Kenya’s DRE workforce is higher, though even here, **women are concentrated in the lower-skilled and thus lower-paid roles:** while women constitute 41% of the overall DRE workforce, they make up 45% of the unskilled workforce vs. 32% of workers in semi-skilled roles (e.g. installation and maintenance).^{4,5}

BOX 1: About this project

Value for Women supported KPEA from July 2022 through July 2024 to shift perceptions around women’s suitability for field and technical roles.

This was part of a joint initiative by [Shortlist](#) and [Value for Women](#) under the Women for Green Jobs (W4GJ) program, 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 sub-Saharan Africa.



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 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.



About Value for Women: 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 and research. Value for Women is a woman-led company, and its diverse team is spread across 5 continents with expertise in countless sectors.

BOX 2: Distributed renewable energy explained

Distributed renewable energy (DRE) systems are localized systems that generate renewable energy close to where it is used, such as solar home systems and mini-grids. Unlike large-scale solar or wind plants that supply large-scale energy to major cities, DRE systems typically serve remote or rural areas with limited or no access to traditional power grids, providing energy directly to households or small communities.



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Various sociocultural barriers significantly impact women's participation in (especially) higher-skilled and higher-paying roles, in the DRE sector as elsewhere. Cultural norms and perceptions, alongside more limited access to finance and skills, contribute to these challenges.

Within companies, unconscious biases may perpetuate job segregation, as hiring managers and applicants alike might believe women to be less interested or capable in certain roles.⁶ A recent Value for Women survey⁷ revealed that 12% of men and 4% of women do not see women as equally capable of technical or field roles.⁸

“Sales is such a tasking job, you have to be moving around all the time. Some women don't like to go into sales because of the long hours and traveling up & down all the time.”

– **People and Culture Business Partner, Easy Solar, Sierra Leone**

Beyond biases, other barriers to women's participation in these traditionally men-dominated roles include the **burden of household and childcare responsibilities**, which particularly impact the feasibility of roles requiring significant time away from home, **educational barriers**, such as underrepresentation in STEM fields⁹, and **logistical barriers**, including distance, insecurity and harsh weather.

The increase of women's participation in higher-skilled and higher-paying roles is important for gender equality– but also stands to benefit businesses directly.

Companies have found that women field staff can generally interact more effectively with women end-users, who are often (89% of the time, across Africa)¹⁰ primary users and decision-makers.¹¹ For example: Women technicians can access homes where it may be inappropriate for men to enter.

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

– **HR Assistant, Mwangaza Light, Kenya**

Finally, an improved gender balance contributes to a positive shift in gender and social norms, thus catalyzing a virtuous cycle. In one example, in the communities of Kitui and Homa Bay in rural Kenya, when women began to engage in solar jobs, the social and cultural perceptions of women's roles changed and resulted in greater interest among women for jobs in the sector.¹²

This case study describes the journey of one employer in the renewable energy sector - Kudura Power East Africa - that deliberately tackled perceptions and norms among their workforce and communities of operation. In so doing, it overcame a key obstacle to hiring women into traditionally men-dominated roles.



THE STORY OF KUDURA POWER EAST AFRICA: Addressing community and staff perceptions head-on



2.1 Meet Kudura Power East Africa: A growing provider of renewable energy

[Kudura Power East Africa](#) (KPEA) is a distributed renewable energy company that provides renewable electricity to areas with limited or no electricity via micro- or mini-grids with primary operations in Busia County.¹³ **In 2023, KPEA launched an ambitious expansion plan in Kenya:** the company planned to deploy 28 new sites in Turkana County to reach 50,000 new customers. This would require **growing KPEA's workforce from 35 to 150 employees** within 3 to 4 years.

KPEA wanted to achieve this growth largely by increasing women's representation in its workforce. This was partly because KPEA perceived women as more likely than men to stay with the company for the long term, thanks to not only pay but also valuing the company culture and values, and partly because KPEA wanted to reach women customers.

“With women you can build much more loyalty. When they find themselves in a place they like working, that features strongly in a decision that's not just about money. Whereas in my experience in Kenya, a Kenyan man will move for a couple hundred [shillings more per] month.”

– CEO, KPEA

However, the company struggled to hire women for open roles, citing a lack of applications from experienced women candidates and a reluctance from women to relocate to Busia¹⁴ or Turkana¹⁵.

2.2 Diagnosing the problem: How KPEA uncovered priority areas for action

To better understand the barriers preventing KPEA from hiring more women employees, KPEA and Value for Women conducted a holistic gender diagnostic. The diagnostic revealed that women were under-represented across the entire company, and there were no women in technical or field roles. As of April 20, 2023, **women represented:**



13% of the overall workforce;



0% of the technical workforce; and



0% of field staff (technicians and security staff)

The diagnostic unearthed several reasons for the lack of women applicants for field and technical roles.

Limited HR resources to develop and implement inclusive recruitment processes.

Due to the absence of dedicated HR staff, a committee of employees (lacking both time and HR expertise) from various departments managed HR tasks. This hindered the development of inclusive recruitment processes and limited targeted outreach to women's groups for hiring. Moreover, because the unstandardized processes lacked objectivity, they risked disadvantaging women applicants.

“Maybe the information isn't reaching the women. In rural areas, online information isn't sufficient.”

- Office Administrator, KPEA

Experienced women engineers were reluctant to leave their current employers for roles in rural areas like Busia or Turkana, which was a significant challenge because KPEA sought to hire engineers with prior experience. Safety and security concerns further complicated hiring in Turkana.

“We haven't had women applying for 2 reasons. First, we don't work in Nairobi. That's a challenge for any woman graduate because it means you need to move to Busia or Turkana, which aren't great places to live... And second, we wouldn't hire an engineer straight out of university- we'd look for people with a few years of experience in a similar setting, with [an electric utility or similar]. But what tends to happen is that once women get into those companies, they tend to stay long term.”

- CEO, KPEA

Finally, many employees believed that women were not interested in field and technical roles, and that especially local hires would be challenging from that perspective. Some employees suggested that women might leave their jobs due to marriage, hinting at biases that manifest in candidate evaluations.

“We are not against employing girls, but we would rather have someone who will stay in the community for a very long time. A girl might want to get married after a year or so, and then we have to go back to the drawing board.”

- Project Development Manager, KPEA

Together, these factors created a significant shortage of women candidates at KPEA.

BOX 3: What is a holistic gender diagnostic?

At Value for Women, a **gender diagnostic** is an assessment to identify:

- The presence of any gender gaps in the organization (in representation, satisfaction, growth, pay, or challenges experienced);
- The presence and strength of key policies to promote and safeguard gender inclusion (among others, anti-sexual harassment policies); and
- The opportunities for organizations to improve.

It consists of interviews and a review of organizational data, policies, and processes.

Value for Women uses the insights from the diagnostic to design high-impact actions that will advance corporate gender and business outcomes. These are then prioritized by the company's leadership and translated into a **Gender Action Plan**, which serves as a work plan for implementing those actions.

TAKING ACTION: Shifting perceptions through training, community engagements, and deliberate recruitment

Based on the findings from the gender diagnostic, KPEA developed a Gender Action Plan (GAP) to increase women's participation in its workforce, particularly in technical and field roles.

The GAP aimed to increase women's representation in the KPEA workforce from 13% to 50% over the course of the company's expansion to the 28 new sites.

KPEA took a three-pronged approach to increasing women's participation in its workforce.

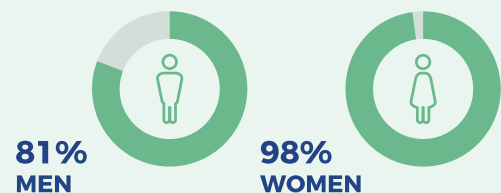
- 1. KPEA aimed to challenge employee perceptions that women aren't interested in or incapable of field and technical roles.** By raising awareness internally, KPEA aimed to foster a belief that women can excel in such positions despite societal norms and reduce unconscious bias.
- 2. KPEA sought to be more intentional about reaching out to women candidates and ensuring that hiring processes would not be biased against them.** In addition, KPEA updated all HR policies and practices to ensure they promote gender equality and social inclusion throughout the employee lifecycle.
- 3. KPEA sought to recruit from local communities, recognizing that particularly women candidates were reluctant to relocate to Busia or Turkana.** To encourage more local women to apply for technical and field roles, KPEA conducted a survey to understand community perceptions and barriers for women (the findings are detailed in Box 4) and acted on the findings.

BOX 4: Community perception survey

Understanding the challenges of recruiting local women from rural areas, which were known to be more conservative, the company sought to understand and address social and cultural norms as well as perceptions that might deter these women from applying for field and technical roles. KPEA started by conducting a community survey in November 2023 among 47 men and 45 women in Busia County.

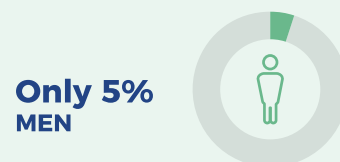
KPEA found that the biggest barrier to women in communities applying for jobs at KPEA was their lack of awareness of what these roles entail. Specifically, the data showed that:

Fig 1. Percentage of community members that are not opposed to women working outside home



Community members are not opposed to women working outside the home in general. 81% of men and 98% of women believe that even when jobs are scarce, men and women should have equal rights to a job.

Fig 2. Percentage of members that feel these jobs are unsuitable for women



Community members were unsure about women working for KPEA or doing installations, largely because they did not know what these jobs actually were. Only 5% of men and no women felt these jobs were unsuitable for women, but nearly half were neutral. Similarly, about half agreed that women and men are equally capable of doing mini-grid installations, while the rest had a neutral opinion. Most neutral respondents indicated they lacked enough information about these jobs to form an opinion.

KPEA concluded that additional community sensitization on KPEA, its work, and the potential responsibilities these roles entail had the potential to shift perceptions on the suitability of field and technical roles for women.

Action 1

Foundational gender-inclusive workplace training to the Chief Operating Officer, department heads, and the Operations & Maintenance team, to shift internal perceptions that women are disinterested in or incapable of technical and field roles

RESULTS

This training significantly and effectively changed staff perceptions about women's ability and interest in field and technical roles. Employees are now discussing ways to redesign field roles to make them safer for women, such as implementing day shifts exclusively for women staff. They are also advocating to management for more women in these positions. Management, on their part, recognized they might have unconsciously been (unfairly) holding women to higher performance standards than men for the same roles, and now plan to take action to correct this bias.

“The team asked questions on how to manage breakdowns during the night with [female and] male technicians. This helps to create a safe place for women in technical positions at the company. An ... ongoing team conversation is for technical teams to take shifts- this will help us to create a condition where women are working daytime shifts.”

- COO, KPEA

“I've known the norms, but not in that form, because it's ingrained in us from birth. So the explanation about the gender biased norms being something we should work on slowly by slowly is something that I can't say I knew.”

- County Business Manager,
KPEA

“After the training, it really changed because everybody feels like a woman can also do whatever we are doing in this society and this field.”

- Senior Technician, KPEA

Action 2

Standardized inclusive recruitment practices to reach more women candidates in both local and HQ recruitment:

- Set targets for women candidates with recruiters
- Encouraged employee referrals of women candidates
- Used inclusive job descriptions, interview questions, and standardized scoring
- Tracked sex-disaggregated data at every hiring stage

RESULTS

Standardized inclusive recruitment practices at KPEA have already shown promising results. The company hired a **local woman as a technical intern** and **shortlisted two local women for the Technical Engagement Manager role**– the first time women were ever shortlisted for this position.

By tracking the number of women applying and being shortlisted for jobs, **KPEA is now able to identify where women drop out of the recruitment process** and make targeted improvements in future.

Action 3

Deliberate awareness raising of field and technical roles among local communities, with a clear target of 50% women's representation.

KPEA clearly stated to local communities that these roles are open to both women and men, encouraging women to apply. The team held **community workshops**¹⁶ in Busia to discuss job opportunities, descriptions, and requirements— emphasizing women's suitability for these roles. Additionally, a **woman intern was deployed to engage directly with community members** in Busia, further strengthening the message that women are suitable for and welcome in these roles.

RESULTS

These actions have shifted community members' perceptions of the suitability of women in technical and field roles, leading to increased applications from women.

In Busia, community meetings revealed that women were unaware they were able to apply for these roles, and expressed interest in doing so. Other attendees expressed eagerness in communicating open roles at KPEA to their daughters and other young women in their communities.

“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

The woman intern's successful engagement with community members demonstrated that women can excel in these roles, inspiring others. In Turkana county, KPEA hired a customer experience team that is now 30% women, a significant change in a region where no women had previously applied for such roles due to social norms.

“By sensitizing other members of the community and also doing the hard work to encourage more women to do the applications, they can get the opportunity in our company.”

– Senior Technician, KPEA

“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 or better... Also if she happened to find a woman in the house, she was able to engage the women in the house and speak to them about her role – which was also an impact for women in the household.”

– Senior Technician, KPEA

Action 4

KPEA has further revamped its HR policies to promote Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI). By mainstreaming GESI considerations and adopting a gender-inclusive approach to professional development and mentorship, KPEA aims to create a more equitable workplace.

RESULTS

While it is too early to measure the full impact, expected results include increased employee retention and improved advancement opportunities for women.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Addressing mindsets for inclusion

KPEA's experience shows that taking small, deliberate actions to increase gender inclusion in roles traditionally deemed masculine can ultimately have outsized impact and create a virtuous cycle shifting social and gender norms.

These kinds of engagements are key for any organization in sectors, or with roles, that might traditionally be considered less suitable for women. We encourage all readers to review the recommendations in the following box, and take first steps to engage staff and communities alike on the gendered perceptions they might currently hold. Through deliberate and targeted engagement, companies can all contribute to more inclusive, equitable, productive and thriving sectors.



It should be noted at this stage, of course, that norms and perceptions are but one part of the puzzle. In many instances, there are many practical and logistical barriers that might prohibit women from applying for or taking on certain roles. It is important to take a holistic approach to increasing women's representation, and ensure that you also map and address other relevant barriers.

TIPS FOR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:

How to start shifting perceptions about suitable work for women

While every company faces a different local and business context, companies can draw inspiration from KPEA's experience, by taking action in the following ways:

- 1. Change the company, not the women.**
 - **Address unconscious bias:** Conduct training and sensitization programs to help employees rethink their biases and increase motivation to recruit women into traditionally men-dominated roles.
 - **Improve job communication:** Ensure job openings are advertised in channels accessible to women to boost application rates.
 - **Standardize recruitment:** Implement standardized recruitment processes to minimize bias at all stages of candidate evaluation.
- 2. Acknowledge gender and social norms.**
 - **Combat stereotypes:** Recognize that gender norms can hinder women in remote or rural communities, but don't assume them to be insurmountable.
 - **Transparency and encouragement:** Be transparent about the nature and requirements of roles, and set and communicate explicit targets to encourage women to apply.
- 3. Lead by example.**
 - **Showcase accomplishments:** Once women are hired for traditionally men-dominated roles, highlight their successes both internally and externally. This will increase awareness among employees and community members of women's capabilities in these positions.



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Endnotes

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- 11 SNV. "The Effects of Health Promotion Campaign on Purchase of ACE-1 Cookstove: Final Report." SNV. 2015. <https://mediamanager.sei.org/documents/Publications/SNV-2015-Cookstoves-health-Cambodia-study.pdf>
- 12 Tanja Winther. "Solar powered electricity access: Implications for women's empowerment in rural Kenya." Energy Research & Social Science. 2018. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327816012_Solar_powered_electricity_access_Implications_for_women's_empowerment_in_rural_Kenya
- 13 A mini-grid is a stand-alone electricity generation source and distribution network, often powered by solar, hydro or wind energy. It delivers electricity to communities in locations where connection to the main grid network is inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. Mini-grids can range in size from micro (typically serving 20-100 customers) to full mini-grids (serving well over 500 customers). In rural settings, customers are typically individual households but may also include local businesses, as well as community facilities, such as churches, schools and health clinics. From: The World Bank (2017), "Mini-grids & gender equality: Inclusive design, better development outcomes".
- 14 Busia County is currently the poorest county in Kenya. It is largely rural, having no cities with populations over 75,000.
- 15 Turkana is the one of the poorest counties in Kenya, with roughly eight in ten of its inhabitants living below the poverty line. It is inhabited largely by nomadic pastoralists and. And has high levels of insecurity.
- 16 Meetings were attended as follows: 1) Dirakho: 17 women, 28 men; 2) Mufumu: 12 women, 20 men.