

Empowering Women in Renewable Heating and Cooling: Boosting Participation and Impact

The SOLTRAIN+ project is actively encouraging women to participate in the Renewable Heating and Cooling (RHC) sector by first understanding the needs in the five Southern African partner countries, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

On November 22, 2023, Gender Managers (GMs) from SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (SACREEE), Namibia Energy Institute (NEI), Solar Industries Association Botswana (SIAB) and AEE - Institute for Sustainable Technologies (AEE INTEC), Selma Festus, Fenni Shidhika, Karen Gibson and Monica Spork-Dur, respectively, co-hosted the first Gender & Diversity (G&D) hybrid event at the Safari Mercure Hotel in Windhoek, Namibia. The workshop was on the margins of the 7th SOLTRAIN Regional Conference hosted by SACREEE and NEI on November 22-23, 2023 at the same venue. The workshop presented the gender and diversity work package in the SOLTRAIN+ initiative as well as the value chains and opportunities in the RHC sector. The event was opened by Kudakwashe Ndhulukula, the Executive Director of SACREEE. Karen Gibson gave an overview of the G&D work package highlighting opportunities for SOLTRAIN+ with a call to increase strategic partnerships with other organizations through the gender multiplier implementation structure.

The Honorable Kornelia K. Shilunga, the Deputy Minister of Mines and Energy in Namibia, inspired the workshop participants by reminiscing on the importance of women in energy, the struggles for female participation in politics, and finally, the recent joys of an inclusive 50/50 gender balance in the political space in Namibia. Her message was clear that to affect deep structural and sustainable change in male-dominated sectors such as energy, women should not shy away from politics since this is the platform where influencing decision-making processes are made. To better understand the barriers faced by women entering the RHC industry in the SOLTRAIN+ partner countries, a team comprising Selma Festus, Karen Gibson, and



The Gender & Diversity workshop participants with Hon. Kornelia Shilunga, Deputy Minister of Mines and Energy, Namibia.

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Monica Spork-Dur with the assistance of seven gender managers and multipliers has undertaken some ground truthing in these partner countries.

Due to limited literature directly relating to women in the sector, a survey was conducted in the countries with 103 responses, 80% of which were women in the RHC sector. Results show that almost 40% of the workforce are women in small, medium, and large organizations from the hundred and three responses, however, less than 20% are in technical positions.

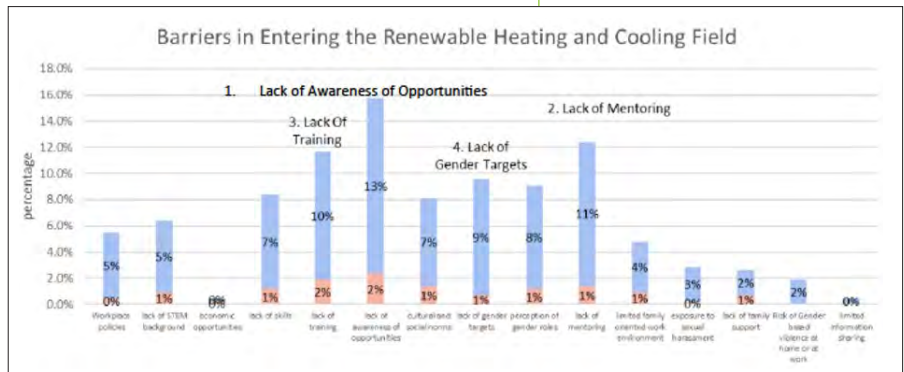
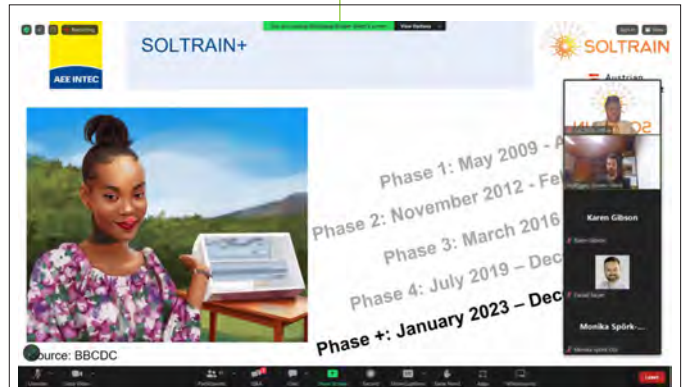
The feedback from the survey identifies the key barriers and includes the need for capacity building, providing equal opportunities, gender training, and the need for cultural and social norms to change.

Some of the recommendations from the study include that workplace practices should incorporate training for the office staff and the community at large. In addition, there is a need to encourage women to participate in capacity building, installing demonstration systems, participating in research tasks, applying for bursary funding, and designing additional activities to raise awareness and create dialogue.

To continue the work of this first meeting, The first Gender Webinar was held on June 5, 2024, the webinar drew a strong turnout and marked an important step in tackling climate change. This virtual event delved into the crucial topic of climate change awareness and mitigation through SOLTRAIN+ activities. The webinar focused on understanding climate change dynamics, showcasing renewable heating and cooling technologies, highlighting SOLTRAIN+ mitigation measures, sharing regional opportunities, and identifying actions to enhance women’s participation. Also, the webinar highlights renewable heating and cooling technology options and mitigation measures being implemented by the project. Presenting the need for the technology and the applications, the opportunities brought in by the project to the region and areas of inclusive actions to increase the participation of women in the sector.

You can follow the SOLTRAIN+ Gender & Diversity initiative’s work to support the participation of women and young talent in the renewable heating and cooling sector on the SOLTRAIN website, <https://www.soltrain.org/>.

This article was contributed by Selma Fetu, of SACREEE (SADC Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency)



▲ Overall barriers to entering the renewable heating and cooling sector.