

GREEN JOBS FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA: OPPORTUNITIES AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS



The transition to a green economy will create many new jobs around the world, including in sub-Saharan Africa. But will women share-in these new jobs, and will the economic transformation help them move into higher-paid, more stable jobs that require more education and skills? The short answer is “yes” – provided countries adopt strong policies and programmes to make it happen.

The transition to the green economy will be a major trend shaping socioeconomic outcomes worldwide over the next 50 years. This transition will create new economic opportunities, spawning new jobs and spurring the adaptation of existing jobs. One projection is 24 million new jobs created worldwide just by the changes necessary to hold global warming to 2° C.¹

The green economy transition is attracting attention in policy circles but its potential gender impact has been less discussed. Questions such as what share of green jobs will be accessible to women and what types of jobs they will be, are worth asking now. The answers will forecast whether the green transition will be fair and equitable or biased against women and girls.

This policy brief presents findings of a study that applies a gender lens to job creation in the green transition in sub-Saharan Africa. It assesses opportunities for women’s participation in green jobs in key sectors driving growth in African economies, explores obstacles limiting women’s access to those jobs, and identifies policy solutions to overcome them and promote job opportunities for women. In the process, it identifies which sectors will offer “quick wins” – relatively rapid access to green jobs – or “slow wins”, requiring long-term strategies to remove legal barriers and change social norms. Quick wins can be considered those achievable by 2030, the time frame of the Sustainable Development Goals, while slow wins might take place by 2063, the time frame of the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

Africa and the world are looking forward to recovering from a historic pandemic. The focus on green jobs for women represents an intersection of the concerns of gender advocates who want to influence post-COVID-19 recovery (in the short term) and transition to the green economy (in the medium to long term) and of green economy experts and policymakers who seek a better understanding of the gender dimensions of the green economy and how to develop fair and gender-responsive green economy policies in the region.

Green jobs for women in Africa

Women are well positioned in some of the sectors where green jobs will be created. A range of sectors will create green jobs in sub-Saharan Africa (see chart below), with energy, construction and agriculture creating the largest number. Women currently hold many of the jobs in agriculture. Forestry and tourism, where green jobs’ growth is also expected in the region, are also important areas of female employment.

However, women are underrepresented in key sectors of the green economy that will offer the best green jobs. Those sectors most likely to create higher-end green jobs include energy (especially wind and solar), transportation, construction and some niche areas of services (e.g., green advisory). Women are overrepresented in agriculture, waste management and certain areas of renewable energy (biomass), which are likely to create mostly lower-end jobs. The mix will depend to a certain degree on country policies.

¹ International Labour Organization (ILO). 2018. *World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with jobs*.

A positive development, however, is that **even in sectors where women are not well represented, they are finding niches**, often as small women-led businesses in indirect jobs in green construction, renovation or energy efficiency.

Women face several barriers that may limit their full access to green jobs in the coming years. Some of these barriers are sector-specific, such as social norms that deem construction jobs inappropriate for women. Others

permeate all sectors. These include barriers to women's and women-led businesses' access to land, finance and technology; gender segregation in the education system and labour market; laws that limit women's access to certain tasks and jobs; and structural inequalities reflecting social norms dictating that women should shoulder the great majority of unpaid care work, effectively depriving them of opportunities for other jobs.

GREEN JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sector	Potential to create green jobs	Potential to create higher-end green jobs	Quick-win area for women's employment in sub-Saharan Africa
Agriculture (greening of conventional)	●	●	●
Agriculture organic/conservation farming	●	●	●
Fisheries	●	●	●
Forestry (sustainable forestry management and reforestation)	● → ●	●	●
New Green Services	●	● → ●	●
Tourism (greening tourism and nature/eco-tourism)	●	●	●
Waste management/recycling	● → ●	●	●
Transportation	●	● → ●	● → ●
Solar energy	●	●	● → ●
Biomass energy	●	●	●
Wind energy	●	●	●
Construction	●	●	●

Note: This table presents a visual summary of the results of the mapping exercise to identify opportunities for women in green jobs in sub-Saharan Africa. Detailed analysis can be found in the report 'Green Job Opportunities for Women in Africa'. The second column of this table classifies sectors according to their potential to create green jobs. The third column presents information regarding the quality of green jobs likely to be created in each sector. The last column classifies sectors according to their potential as a quick win for women's participation in green jobs in the future, based on current levels of women's labour force participation in the sector in sub-Saharan Africa.

● Low ● Medium ● High



Photo: Fabio Jafet/ILO

The transition to the green economy offers unique opportunities to reduce gender inequalities in sub-Saharan Africa, including by:

- **Changing perceptions about what are acceptable male and female jobs, and eroding strong patterns of horizontal gender segregation in the labour market.** Many of the jobs in the green economy will be in new occupations, not yet socially assigned to men or women. Thus, there are opportunities for women to claim new jobs as engineers, architects, energy-efficiency advisers, drivers of green buses or green innovators across many different fields. The many women-led small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) installing solar panels across the region illustrate how to pierce the ‘glass walls’ and enter male-dominated sectors such as construction. With the support of strong public policies, these early successes can model new roles for women and have a multiplier effect in coming generations.
- **Assigning economic value to women’s unpaid work on behalf of the environment.** Women across Africa play a critical role as managers of natural resources, contributing to the environmental sustainability and resilience of their communities. This work is often unpaid and done on a voluntary basis. New green economic instruments such as carbon credits and payments for environmental services schemes in tourism, forestry and other sectors can change this by assigning economic value to women’s unpaid work. Additionally, the

transition to green economic activity can be coupled with upgrading and formalizing women’s current activities in the informal economy in waste management and agriculture through women-led collective action and networks. Initiatives in these areas can be scaled up to become game-changers for women in sub-Saharan Africa.

Policy recommendations

Appropriate public policies and programmes are needed to ensure that women get an equitable share of green jobs. In the short term, policies that support and encourage women and prepare them for new green jobs will maximize quick wins in sectors such as agriculture or tourism. Productive strategies may include capacity-building, reskilling and leveraging high-value green sectors where women are already present or well positioned. Longer-term efforts will be needed in more male-dominated sectors, such as energy, construction and transportation, to remove structural barriers and set the foundations for slow wins in decades to come.

Action needs to start now – on both short-term and long-term strategies – while there is still time to prevent the green transition from being severely biased against women and girls. Governments and advocates can take immediate advantage of the reformist drive of COVID-19 recovery or piggyback on other relevant national and regional policy processes to promote long-term and far-reaching

structural changes. Long-term strategies must start now to ensure that **conditions are in place for women and girls to leapfrog to high-productivity green jobs**, skipping the slow climb from one low-productive job to one that is slightly better.

Recommendations for specific policies to leverage women's green job opportunities fall into three categories. First, policies to *get women and girls ready for the green economy* through education, skills-development, capacity-building and institutional support to women-led businesses. However, **a major conclusion of this study is that policies on skills-development**, which concentrate the majority of policy interventions to promote green jobs, **will not be enough for women and girls to benefit from green economy opportunities** and access a fair share of the jobs to be created. There is thus a need for *policies to level the playing field* by addressing structural barriers that women face in accessing green jobs. Finally, policies should *accelerate action to promote a gender-responsive green economy* so that change can happen within a reasonable time frame.

Recommendations to get women ready for the green economy

Reducing horizontal segregation in the labour market, to allow women access to all green jobs on equal terms with men, will require a combination of education policies, strong female role models and support mechanisms for women in male-dominated sectors. Policies should:

Undo gender segregation in education and promote women's participation in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. If women are to reap the benefits of the green transition in sub-Saharan Africa, there needs to be strong leadership and investment to improve their access to education in technical and STEMs subjects and careers at all levels of the education system, from primary to tertiary, including vocational education and training.

Reskill and upskill. Retooling the labour force for the future of work is, according to the African Development Bank, a priority for Africa in the strategy for recovery from economic shocks associated with COVID-19. The report recommends that governments scale-up efforts to retrain and reskill the labour force as quickly and as broadly as possible to facilitate workers' transition from low-productivity, obsolete sectors and jobs to new and emerging ones. This is particularly important in the context of women's access to green jobs in the region.

Reskilling and upskilling strategies will be needed to ensure that women can access new green job opportunities in sectors where women are already well positioned, but the greening of jobs will require new skills – for example, in agriculture and services. Training offers should reflect the current and future needs of the labour market, economy and environment.

Develop women's networks in male-dominated sectors.

Such networks can be key to enhance women's participation in those sectors, including through the nurturing of female role models. Establishing professional women's networks and business associations in key sectors of the green economy with higher barriers to entry by women (e.g., construction, energy and transportation) are a mechanism to support existing female professionals and to encourage others to join. They can be instrumental in advocating for corporate policies adapted to women's needs, facilitate investments in women-owned businesses and start-ups in these sectors, and be a source for mentoring and coaching of women.

Support the transition towards the formal economy, which can facilitate women's movement into better-paying green jobs with better working conditions. This will be particularly critical in sectors such as agriculture, forestry or waste, and to a lesser extent tourism. Steps in that direction include:

- **Supporting the organization of women** into women-led cooperatives and economic groups, and strengthening their institutional capacities, including through aggregation into federations to facilitate collective action, access to inputs, finance and markets.
- **Investing in research and innovation**, leveraging women's knowledge, for product development, coupled with technical support in quality standards, to access green certification schemes and circular economy markets, including for export.
- **Establishing incentives to support the formalization** of women's informal economic activity, coupled with education and sensitization on the advantages of formalization.
- **Developing financial products** (and delivery channels) adapted to the needs of women's cooperatives and micro-enterprises, including using digital solutions to access to finance, especially for small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs who do not have well-established relationships with financial institutions.

Recommendations to level the playing field for a gender-responsive green economy

Addressing social norms and improving the enabling environment for women's participation in the green economy is crucial. This requires overcoming biases and expectations around the distribution of unpaid care work, as well as overturning laws that particularly limit women's access to resources and means to undertake economic activities. To this end, specific recommendations include:

- **Remove legal barriers** and address gender discrimination in legislation. This is a relatively straightforward action that can be taken in the short term. Key areas for reform include: 1) Amending legislation to ensure women and men equal rights to ownership of immovable property (land) as well as to equalize the inheritance rights of sons and daughters; 2) Introducing legislation (and enforcement mechanisms) in the area of sexual harassment in the workplace, particularly in male-dominated areas of the green economy (energy, construction, transport, etc.); 3) Amending legal provisions that do not allow women to open a bank account or move freely in the same way as men, required for doing business and for holding jobs on an equal basis with men; 4) Removing legal restrictions on women's access to specific jobs and tasks; and

5) Additional policy and legal provisions to incentivize the development of corporate policies for women employees can also play a critical role in certain sectors.

- **Balance men's and women's responsibilities for care.** Addressing inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care can have an important impact on enabling women to take paid jobs, including in the green economy. Governments should invest in expanding care services, investing in infrastructure and implementing policies to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care. A focus on recognition and making visible women's unpaid care work is particularly important in sub-Saharan Africa, where a large part of care work is informal. Changing social norms through education and communication and the involvement of men and boys are important means to affect change in this area in the medium term.

Invest in role-modelling and focusing on youth to change stereotypes about acceptable jobs for men and women.

Entrenched gender segregation in education and the labour market is an important barrier for women's access to high-quality green jobs in certain sectors. In large part, this segregation results from social perceptions about what is acceptable work for women. Such perceptions evolve slowly, but governments, civil society and community leaders



Photo: ILO

can take the lead through education, social communication and advocacy, leveraging positive role models of women working in male-dominated sectors and by addressing young men and women from an early age. In the past, involving men and boys, including traditional leaders, in efforts to change social norms has proven effective in other domains such as gender-based violence prevention in the region.

Recommendations to accelerate action for a gender-responsive green economy

Affirmative action to integrate gender targets and objectives into existing and new economic policy instruments can accelerate women's access to green jobs. Through regulation, governments can open up opportunities for women in areas of the green economy that have the potential to generate many green jobs but have high entry barriers for women and thus increase the speed with which change takes place. As countries explore and identify the appropriate combination of taxes, subsidies, incentives and other economic instruments to encourage a transition to the green economy, such measures can be designed in a way that supports women's employment objectives. To this end, recommendations include:

- **Promote affirmative green and sustainable public procurement initiatives.** By greening their own procurement processes, governments can contribute substantially to a cleaner, greener environment and set a powerful example. In Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and elsewhere, procurement reforms are promoting preferential access for women-led businesses to public contracts and building their capacity to access public tenders. Such initiatives, when applied to green procurement processes, can accelerate women-led businesses' access to new green public markets.
- **Leverage existing green economic policy instruments.** Governments have at their disposal a number of economic instruments to foster the transition towards a green economy – for example, the removal of fossil fuel subsidies, loans or subsidies to invest in renewable energy or energy-efficient technologies, and feed-in tariffs. In some cases, these measures will increase the number of green jobs. Specific provisions can be incorporated into the design of these instruments to carve out specific employment targets for women-led businesses, or for women directly. Green climate finance projects and other instruments, such as green bonds,

can also stipulate targets for female employment. The development of carbon-credit mechanisms, particularly in sectors where many women currently work without formal pay, such as tree-planting in rural and urban landscapes and waste management, can expand high-end green jobs in quick-win areas of women's green employment.

The way forward

Improving women's access to green jobs must begin with country-level conversations in the context of national processes of green economy transition. This requires country-level analysis to find specific solutions that fit each country's green economic transition strategy, specific to post-COVID-19 fiscal realities and gender dynamics in national labour markets. The formulation of national green jobs strategies, currently underway in a number of countries in the region, presents an opportunity to contextualize and apply some of the high-level recommendations of this report.

In this process, it will be important for states to build their capacity to formulate and implement gender-responsive green-economy strategies. This includes strengthening their capabilities to collect and analyze sex-disaggregated data, an important gap identified by our research, and to formulate gender-responsive economic policy, planning and budgeting. It also will be critical to increase women's participation in green economy decision-making forums and technical task forces, and to create institutional spaces for dialogue and the co-creation of policy solutions where women's advocates can actively participate.

