

# The Light-bringers of Madagascar: Empowering women to lead the country's clean energy transformation

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In Madagascar, women are at the forefront of a clean energy revolution, powering their businesses and lighting up a new path for the country's energy transformation. Under the Powering Gender Equality (PGE) initiative, UNDP is supporting women in developing skills in solar technology to drive entrepreneurial ventures and create income-generating opportunities.

Mino Rakotobe, Specialist in Women's Empowerment in the AMP Project in Madagascar, and Evrard Karol Ekouedjen, Renewable Energy Specialist at UNDP Madagascar, share their insights into how the PGE initiative is addressing deep-seated gender and energy inequalities, equipping women with technical skills, and transforming their roles in the energy sector.

## Energy access and gender inequality in Madagascar

Madagascar has set an ambitious target to reach 70% electricity access by 2030, but access remains inconsistent and out of reach for much of the population. "Only 37% of the population has access to electricity, with only 15% in rural areas and approximately 70% in urban areas," explains Evrard Ekouedjen. Access to clean cooking is even scarcer: "Only 1 percent of Malagasy people have access to cooking energy and technology, with most relying on woodfire and charcoal, which contributes to the country's deforestation," he adds.

Evrard emphasizes that energy access is closely tied to gender and economic disparities. "Most Malagasy people live on less than a dollar a day, which makes them vulnerable to a host of other problems," he notes. Gender inequality is among these issues, with women heavily excluded from household decision-making and the formal energy sector. "Women are responsible for household cooking, collecting wood, charcoal, and water, even in urban or peri-urban areas," Evrard highlights, noting how women's energy use is tied to care work while men dominate formal energy jobs.

## Transforming energy governance and empowering women

This is where the Powering Gender Equality initiative comes in. The ambitious project aims to enhance gender-responsive energy governance, improve policy frameworks, and boost women's economic empowerment. Women in Madagascar are not just passive beneficiaries of clean energy solutions—they are shaping and leading the country's energy transformation.

A key component of the program focuses on training women to install and repair solar hub systems, as well as equipping them with skills in biogas technologies. The initiative has already made significant progress, reaching 15 women, 10 of whom are from Betioky commune in Atsimo Andrefana region and 5 from Mahitsy commune in Analamanga region. "We have implemented the training for the targeted women, and the aim was to build their capacity and make them able to install and repair themselves solar home systems" shares Evrard.

## Expanding opportunities: biogas and entrepreneurship

In addition to solar energy, the program is expanding into biogas technologies. "We are working closely with an NGO which will be in charge of the capacity building of women on mobile biodigester building and repairing, and also on biogas cookstove production," Evrard explains. These efforts provide women with essential technical skills and create new economic opportunities.

The program also supports women in launching entrepreneurial ventures. “We are supporting them to become businesswomen in energy,” Evrard says. Women are organized into groups and provided with seed funds to purchase solar kits or components to sell in their communities. Another avenue is managing nano-grids. “We have solar boxes of two kilowatts each that women can use to create and run nano-grids for their communities, for which they will be remunerated,” Evrard highlights.

## Challenging gender norms and garnering community support



Figure 1 : Men of fokontany Ankazombalala who attended the community discussion and awareness raising.

The success of the program hinges not just on technical training but also on community support. Mino Rakotobe, worked closely with both women and men to challenge traditional gender norms and encourage women’s participation in the energy sector. “Through dialogues and trainings with men, we were able to garner their support for women attending the sessions,” Mino explains. “Women often have too many responsibilities at home, so we encouraged men to step in and help with household tasks to enable women to fully participate.”

Mino has been heartened by the response. “Men who were initially skeptical have

become advocates for the initiative. Once men saw the benefits for their households, they became more collaborative and supportive of women’s participation in clean energy,” she notes. Some men even took on household tasks, freeing up time for women to attend training sessions.

## Building confidence and breaking barriers

For the women, the training has been transformative. “Women have more confidence in themselves and they realize they can do other things than in household chores and technical things like installing and maintaining solar systems. It was a big revelation for them to see they can do this technical work,” Mino shares.

The program’s impact extends beyond individual empowerment. It shows that the future of Madagascar’s clean energy transformation is one where women lead, women prosper, and everyone benefits collectively.



Figure 2: Participants from Ankazombalala during the training session on entrepreneurial techniques and marketing of photovoltaic equipment.

## Women as innovators and changemakers

As Evrard emphasizes, “These women are becoming ‘light-bringers’ in their communities. By empowering

women economically and in the energy sector, we are building more resilient communities.” Through their leadership, these women are not only helping Madagascar achieve its clean energy goals but also redefining what is possible for women in the energy sector. They are innovators, entrepreneurs, and changemakers in Madagascar’s clean energy future.

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*Figure 3: Training session on installation and maintenance of domestic photovoltaic systems, Tuléar - June 2024.*