

GENDER BALANCE

In the news, there are numerous articles about the rise of renewables. But I want to focus on how the rise of renewables is a significant source of jobs.

Let me give you a few examples. A recent *Forbes* article discussed how decentralised power systems and distributed renewable energy is playing a notable role today in employment in Africa and Asia, and this workforce is expected to grow significantly. For example, in Kenya, nearly as many people are employed by renewable energy companies as there are employed in the state utility. This is expected to grow by 70% in the next three to four years.

The same article also noted an estimate that by 2022 there will be 1.3mn full-time jobs in the off-grid solar sector alone, not including mini-grids that enable some of this technology. Looking at the US, the roles of solar installer and wind turbine technician are the fastest growing professions and expected to be so for the next seven years. Today, solar employs twice as many Americans as the coal industry. These are big employment numbers and they are expected to get bigger.

With all this employment, who is filling these jobs?

New census data from 'Power for All' shows that rural electrification using renewable energy is creating jobs in Africa and Asia, for example. The census showed that 40% of these distributed energy jobs are filled by young people. However, the census also showed that women account for just one quarter of these jobs, a lower percentage than the global renewable energy sector.

Gender imbalance is observed in other parts of the world. A recent *Bloomberg* article commented on how women are missing out in one of the largest employment booms and compared the renewable industry to the fossil fuel industry. The first sentence is rather noteworthy: 'Clean energy has a dirty secret' – referring to analysis by the Brookings Institute which found that the non-fossil fuel power sector has less diversity than fossil fuel production, with women accounting for just 13% of the US workforce. At first, this surprised me, but I too have experienced lack of diversity in parts of the industry.

Just this year, I was a panelist at two operations and maintenance conferences for the wind energy industry. From the stage, I could see and count who is representing the



Energising the diversity debate

The energy sector is a source of a significant number of jobs. But how is it performing in terms of diversity? Katy Briggs, Global Service Area Leader for Renewable Advisory Services at DNV GL, casts an eye over the challenges and opportunities for women working in, or trying to enter, the renewable energy sector.

industry. I counted 13 women out of about 120 people, that's about 11%. You could also estimate the racial and ethnic diversity, or lack thereof, at these conferences.

Diversity in the renewables industry does not represent the diversity available in the workforce of these countries. Not all parts of the renewable energy industry have such low diversity statistics. But if you look at these industries as a whole, things look a little bit different.

IRENA, the International Renewable Energy Agency, found that women make up 32% of the global renewable energy workforce, compared to 22% in oil and gas. According to a study by the Boston Consulting Group in 2017: 'Globally, the oil and gas industry ranks second only to construction as the worst for gender equality.'

But which industry is doing better or worse is not really the point. Neither the renewables or

More diversity in the workforce makes good business sense, with some studies showing that companies with more diverse executive teams are more likely to experience above average profits

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oil and gas industry is going home with the trophy right now. Neither is close to the 50% goal, nor the goal of better representing the diversity that exists in the world.

What's the problem?

Why is this a problem and why are we striving for more diversity in our workforce? Because it makes good business sense. This is not a charity project! It has been

shown that companies with more diverse executive teams are more likely to experience above average profits. For example, a McKinsey study showed that companies with more gender diversity in the leadership were 21% more likely to outperform the industry average profit. Meanwhile, ethnically diverse companies were 33% more likely to outperform the average.

If there's a way to increase your odds of good performance by 33%, I think we would do that and that is what I'm saying we should do in this industry. Also, diversity is important because renewable energy is growing rapidly, as I mentioned previously. If we are not welcoming and promoting all the potential talent out there, we will be stifling our industries' growth and its impact. It will be harder to be truly innovative, to have successful companies and to meet the decarbonisation goals we wish to achieve.

So, what can we do about this? I'd like to say: 'Don't worry about it' or 'We're on track', because I have seen a lot of good progress and a lot of great people have really made a difference. But, when I saw the numbers and the trends, I realised that change is actually quite slow. It really hit me a few years ago when I read that at the going rate it would be 276 years before we saw an equal number of men and women CEOs in the Fortune 500... since then there's been slight improvement. Today there are 33 women CEOs in the Fortune 500, just 6%. Based on more recent data, I calculate that gender parity in the Fortune 500 would still take 135 years... that's still not in my lifetime!

How can we make change, and more rapid change? I think it will take more awareness and more intentional actions by all of us, in particular by men as it will continue to be a slow change if



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women and minorities are doing the majority of the work when it comes to creating diversity.

Some suggestions

Here are a few things you can do. There are a lot of campaigns and organisations that are really making a difference, so start checking them out and get involved.

There are a number of examples I'd like to flag up. There's the 'HeForShe' campaign and you can get involved in a diversity organisation, for example WRISE, which stands for 'Women of Renewable Industries and Sustainable Energy'. There is also the EI's 'POWERful Women' initiative (see **box**). Both men and women can get involved in these organisations.

But, to make it even easier, here's one thing you could do today. Take a look at your work, your organisation, and observe how many women and how many men attend the meetings you are involved in. Who gets invited to meetings and which meetings do they get invited to? Amongst peers, who takes on the majority of the note taking and the other meeting housekeeping, and who does not? Who is speaking? How much are they speaking? And who is actually being heard?

That's the awareness part. From these observations, what do you see? Then start thinking about what should change and what could you do to start influencing that change.

If you like this exercise, you can take it further and ask more questions. Things like: How many women speak at the conferences you attend? Who does your company send to the conferences? Who gets high visibility work projects? Who gets more supportive tasks? Who sees your company's job postings? And start talking about it. What do you observe? What actions are really making a difference? What things have you tried?

So, to summarise, there has been, and will continue to be, significant growth in the renewables workforce. Building a more diverse workforce will enable us to achieve the rapid growth that we need and to have a bigger impact. To get there, it will take more awareness and more intentional actions from all of us. ●

POWERful Women: supporting women in energy

POWERful Women is an initiative that seeks to promote the professional growth and leadership development of women across the UK energy sector.

We believe targets are important – what gets measured gets managed – and we are calling for 40% of middle management and 30% of executive board positions to be female by 2030.

Current statistics show that, while progress is being made, there is still a long way to go. Women occupy only 16% of board seats and 6% of executive positions in the UK's top energy companies, and 42% of companies still have no women on their boards at all. Our sector is missing out on a wealth of female talent vital in meeting the energy challenges of the future.

POWERful Women works to achieve its goals in three ways. First, through campaigning and reporting – publishing annual statistics and showcasing those leaders and companies taking steps to improve, like the Energy Leaders' Coalition. Second, actively supporting women in their careers, such as through our popular mentoring programme, POWERful Connections, and our Annual Conference in May. Third, providing practical support to companies to increase gender diversity, such as through our Diversity & Inclusion working groups.

The secretariat of POWERful Women is managed by the Energy Institute (EI). Find out more at www.powerfulwomen.org.uk @_PfWomen ●