

EVI-SICEE BRIEFING NOTE No. 01

Empowering Youth and Women in Clean Energy Entrepreneurship: Insights from a youth focused learning workshop

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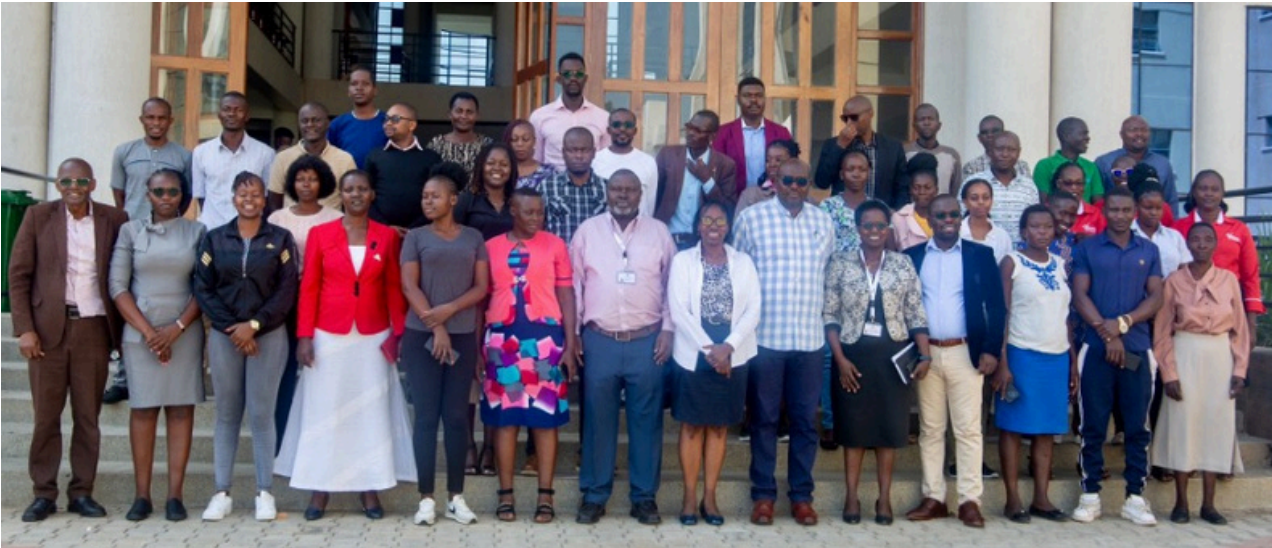


Figure 1: Group photo of participants during the Homabay workshop held at Tom Mboya University

Introduction

Kenya has made notable progress in renewable energy, with over 80% of its electricity generation coming from clean sources. Yet, significant gaps remain. Approximately 20% of rural households still lack access to electricity, while over 70% of households rely on biomass fuels for cooking, driving deforestation and household air pollution.

Youth and women entrepreneurs represent a critical force in Kenya's transition to clean energy. Youth account for 67% of Kenya's unemployed population, with most employed in precarious informal sector jobs. Women, despite being central to household energy use, remain underrepresented in the clean energy value chain.

About the EVI-SICEE Project

The Evidence for Informing Scaling and Impact in Youth and Women-Led Clean Energy Enterprises (EVI-SICEE) project main objective is to understand the systemic factors that enhance or constrain youth's access to entrepreneurial opportunities in clean energy innovation, and how the promising best practices can be scaled up for impact.

The motivation behind the project is that the informal, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that drive economic development in many African countries comprise of a significant population of youth either as clean energy entrepreneurs or employees along the clean energy technologies value chains. This fact makes youth more vulnerable to external shocks like the global economic crisis and the impacts of climate change that do not spare the predominantly informal sector, especially in the rural setting.

The project is funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and implemented by a consortium led by African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS).

The Workshop

The Youth in Clean Energy Entrepreneurship Workshop, was held in Homabay in May 2025, as an activity under the EVI-SICEE project. This workshop provided a strategic opportunity for ACTS, Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YDEF), Kenya Climate Innovation Center (KCIC), two key consortiums members, and Tom Mboya University (TMU) to engage women and youth led clean energy entrepreneurs to upscale and upgrade their business through integrated business support. Designed as an interactive forum, the workshop brought together stakeholders from the grassroots level in Nyanza, Rift-valley, and Western regions in Kenya to collaboratively generate relevant knowledge aimed at stimulating youth interest in clean energy.

The objective of the workshop was to raise awareness of clean energy opportunities driven by climate change while empowering youth and women to identify practical business prospects and develop bankable plans. By analyzing systemic project data, participants evaluated the factors influencing entrepreneurial success and co-developed a strategic roadmap for scaling energy enterprises in Western Kenya and beyond. Finally, the workshop utilized a participatory approach to identify and commission clean energy champions from each participating county to lead local efforts. It brought together over 40 young innovators, women entrepreneurs, policymakers, and stakeholders.

This briefing note synthesizes workshop insights and highlights key findings, implications, and actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and development partners.

Learning insights from the workshop

Youth and women in Homabay showcased diverse innovations in solar irrigation, clean cookstoves, briquette production, and e-mobility. This demonstrates the creative energy and entrepreneurial spirit already present in communities, waiting to be scaled with the right support.

Barriers to Growth

Despite strong interest, entrepreneurs face systemic obstacles. Access to capital was repeatedly cited as the most significant challenge, with most small enterprises unable to access bank loans or investor funding. Some participants reported needing between KES 200,000 –2 million to expand operations. Infrastructure gaps, such as unreliable transport and electricity, further constrain growth.

a) Knowledge and Capacity Gaps

Entrepreneurs often lacked skills in business planning, financial management, marketing, and compliance with government regulations. While passion was evident, many had not previously benefited from structured mentorship, incubation, or training programs.

b) Networking and Partnerships

The workshop successfully connected grassroots entrepreneurs with policymakers, financiers, and academic institutions. Participants emphasized the importance of ongoing platforms for collaboration, market linkages, and joint innovation.

c) Gender Inclusion

Women participants highlighted additional barriers, including cultural expectations, limited mobility, and exclusion from male-dominated networks. Tailored approaches such as flexible training schedules, mentorship, and gender-sensitive financing instruments were seen as crucial to leveling the playing field.

Implications for Policy and Practice

- **Finance & Investment:** Affordable, youth-friendly financial products are urgently needed. Micro-grants, seed funding, and blended finance can unlock enterprise growth.
- **Capacity Development:** Building business and technical skills in clean energy technologies will equip entrepreneurs to compete in expanding markets.
- **Policy & Governance:** County governments must streamline regulatory processes, provide local incentives, and integrate youth voices into energy policy dialogues.
- **Partnerships:** Stronger collaboration across government, academia, civil society, and the private sector is key to scaling innovations.
- **Gender Equity:** Programs must be designed to address barriers faced by women, ensuring their inclusion as leaders in the clean energy transition.

Recommendations

- Develop targeted loan products and grants for youth and women-led enterprises, backed by guarantees to reduce lending risks.
- Establish county-level innovation hubs and incubation centers to deliver training, mentorship, and technical support.
- Institutionalize regular platforms for engagement between entrepreneurs and policymakers, ensuring grassroots voices shape policy.
- Invest in county-based hubs, such as the proposed Knowledge Incubation Hub at Tom Mboya University, to anchor local innovation.
- Mandate gender-sensitive design in all clean energy programs, including quotas, flexible participation models, and collection of sex-disaggregated data.

Conclusion & Next Steps

The Homabay workshop confirmed the transformative potential of youth- and women-led enterprises in advancing Kenya's clean energy future. By addressing structural barriers and investing in finance, capacity, and inclusive policies, Kenya can unlock a new generation of Clean Energy Champions.

Workshop participants were formally recognized as champions of change, tasked with advancing climate-smart entrepreneurship within their counties. Next steps include operationalizing the Knowledge Incubation Hub at Tom Mboya University, monitoring enterprise growth, and mobilizing support from partners such as YEDF, KCIC and ACTS.

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