

Women Are Changing the Household Energy Sector

Source: unfoundation.exposure.co

Published: March 8, 2017

By [UN Foundation](#)

During a recent workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, the [Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves](#) had the chance to talk with women who are dedicating their lives to increasing access to cleaner, more efficient cookstoves and fuels in Africa.

Globally, 3 billion people rely on solid fuels to cook, causing serious environmental and health impacts that disproportionately affect women and children. In fact, household air pollution from cooking kills over 4 million people every year and sickens millions more, according to the World Health Organization.

Yet, safe, affordable, and accessible clean cooking solutions exist that can dramatically reduce fuel consumption and exposure to harmful cookstove smoke, while providing economic opportunities, as we saw at the workshop. The women we met in Kenya – and women like them around the world – are changing the household energy sector. They inspire us, and we hope they inspire you too.



MEET HABIBA

Meet Habiba Ali. Habiba is the managing director of Sosai Renewable Energies Company, an improved cookstoves, solar energy products, and water filters enterprise located in Kaduna, Nigeria. Sosai's 17 employees and 59 youth artisans have developed the vocational skills needed to be successful in the sector. Habiba did not set out with the intention of starting a business, but after attending a forum and hearing how important basic energy is for an individual's health, especially women, she decided to do something about it. Today, Habiba goes into communities to learn about their energy needs and coordinates with the local community to develop tailored solutions. Habiba has vision and drive, but she credits her "giving spirit" as the force behind her company's success.

"I want to touch people's lives, I want to feel people's pain and be able to use technology to solve it."



MEET ESTHER

Meet Esther Ndunge Mutisya. After getting married, Esther would carry heavy clay pots on her back to sell in the market in order to financially provide for herself and her family. One day in the market, she was asked to design and produce similar clay pots as cookstove liners. So she did. At first she could only manage to sell about two units in a month. But through financial, technical, and business support, her production expanded over the years. She now produces and sells between 2,000-3,000 stoves in a month. Esther has the potential for even greater expansion as her production capacity still does not meet her current customer demand.

"You have to accept the challenge and embrace the job. Organize yourselves and know what you want to achieve from your business. Come knowing there are challenges, embrace those challenges, and continue moving forward."



MEET BETTY

Meet Betty Ikalany. Betty is the founder and CEO of AEST, a social enterprise that is creating transformational job opportunities for women in Uganda. Through the Alliance's Women's Empowerment Fund, Betty and AEST expanded production capacity, purchased new machinery, and strengthened their distribution network by training 55 new micro-entrepreneurs. Together, we created new jobs for women, improved the environment through cleaner fuels, and reduced smoke in the homes of families throughout Uganda. Betty is confident, dedicated, and changing the world by helping families in her community gain access to cleaner cookstoves and fuels.

“I think I’m an innovator and so should everyone else. In each of us, we have great ideas that we have not explored, most times because we think we are not fit to be innovators.”



MEET NEREAH

Meet Nereah Nyagol. Growing up, to help support her family, Nereah's mother ventured into business, first with fish mongering, later a second-hand clothes business in Kisumu, Kenya, and eventually selling improved cookstoves. Nereah helped her mother with the production of cookstoves through her school years. Through this exposure, Nereah developed a comprehensive understanding of the sector. Eventually, through training and mentorship in technology and business, Nereah started her own clean cookstoves business. Because of her extensive experience and understanding of the design and production process, Nereah does her own cookstoves assembling from start to finish. She has expanded her business to include one shop and two improved cookstoves outlets, with plans to open a third outlet in the near future.

“[Women] should go for it! Don't fear. Don't fear. Anything that the man can do, we can always do. Let us have the courage to do what we need to do.”



MEET LILIAN

Meet Lilian. While taking senior marketing management classes, she came across an advertisement in her local newspaper for a position with Livelyhoods, an organization that provides employment opportunities for youth and women to market and sell green consumer goods like clean cookstoves and solar lamps in their respective communities. Lilian interviewed, became a Sales Agent and six months later was promoted to Store Manager. Since then, Lilian has become a Regional Manager where she trains other Managers and supports hundreds of young Sales Agents. She has dedicated her life to help provide economic opportunities to marginalized communities so they can break out of the cycle of poverty and improve their own livelihoods.

“I trained [others] and continued to feel like I was growing better and also proud of seeing them continue to grow and fulfill their dreams.”

The global alliance for clean cookstoves

[The Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves](#) is a public-private partnership hosted by the United Nations Foundation that seeks to save lives, improve livelihoods, empower women, and protect the environment by creating a thriving global market for clean and efficient household cooking solutions. The Alliance's 100 by '20 goal calls for 100 million households to adopt cleaner and more efficient cookstoves and fuels by 2020. The Alliance is working with its public, private and non-profit partners to accelerate the production, deployment, and use of clean and efficient cookstoves and fuels in developing countries.

Photos and story by Joel Geertsma
