

Female voices key to success of Nuclear Energy strategy

By Faith Muiruri

At a recent stakeholder meeting in Nairobi about Kenya's plans to explore nuclear energy, uncomfortable scene played out: the women voices and meaningful participation was missing.

As the men in suits outlined timelines, displayed diagrams, and debated regulatory frameworks, with some of them calling it "a generational infrastructure decision," one question lingered heavily in the room.

Who will experience the risks and benefits of nuclear energy, and how will everyday lives be reshaped? Civil society groups in Nairobi say the answer depends on whether women are included in those decisions.

"Energy decisions are not gender-neutral," said Lydia Mwende, program coordinator at Nairobi's Center for Community Rights. "Women carry the burden of household energy, caregiving, and community health. If they aren't in the room, the choices will miss realities that matter most."

Mwende said a nuclear project will affect women and men differently when it comes to issues such as water access, emergency planning, and livelihoods.

A report by the Nairobi Women's Energy Network highlighted several practical reasons for inclusion. "Women's perspectives improve safety planning," said the network's chair, Fatima Otieno.

"They can identify evacuation routes that account for caregiving responsibilities, suggest communication approaches that reach vulnerable groups, and raise concerns about how employment opportunities will be structured so women can actually take them."

Otieno added that when women participate in energy governance, projects tend to allocate more resources to community health, education, and social services.

Civil society organizations were concerned that even if consultations are happening, their design is an obstacle to women participation.

"Public meetings often happen during working hours in central locations that women, especially market traders and caregivers cannot attend," observed Josephine Kariuki of the Nairobi Civic Participation Forum.

"This creates the illusion of public buy-in while excluding those most affected." Kariuki urged planners to schedule diverse engagement formats, such as evening sessions, mobile forums in peri-urban settlements, and use translated materials to broaden participation.

In addition to this, Beyond logistics, Nairobi-based environmental group GreenRoots cautioned that technical and regulatory dialogues must include gender-sensitive environmental impact assessments to enhance effective engagement.

“Radiological safety, waste management, and land-use changes have distinct implications for women,” said GreenRoots’ director, Samuel Njoroge. “Women often depend on local natural resources for fuel, food, and income. Their knowledge about local ecologies is vital for assessing true project impacts.”

Employment and economic inclusion were recurring themes during the meeting. “We welcome job creation, but only if it’s equitable,” said Anne Wanjiru, policy lead at the Women in STEM Coalition, Nairobi. “Training, apprenticeship timing, childcare support, and targeted recruitment matter.

Otherwise, the high-skilled roles will go to men who can relocate or work overtime, while women are confined to lower-paid positions.” Wanjiru urged that procurement clauses and workforce targets be gender-responsive, with measurable accountability.

But for all these to happen, trust, transparency, and accountability need to drive this process. “Nuclear energy carries historical anxieties, about accidents, secrecy, and displacement,” said Lydia Mwendu, an advocate of inclusive energy strategies.

“Meaningful inclusion of women builds trust because women often act as community conveners and advocates for family wellbeing. Their participation signals that impact on households will be taken seriously,” she observed.

Several groups recommended establishing a women-led advisory committee to review risk communication, emergency preparedness, and social compensation frameworks.

Integrating women into nuclear energy meetings is not merely symbolic; it is practical governance that improves safety, fairness, and social legitimacy. “When women contribute, decision-making is better informed and more resilient,” said Fatima Otieno. “This project will reshape communities for decades. We must design it with those who care for those communities.”

As Nairobi’s civic groups prepare policy briefs and community outreach, their message is clear: nuclear energy discussions should not be confined to technical elites and mainly men. The voices of women-caregivers, farmers, health workers, entrepreneurs, and engineers-are essential to ensure that Kenya’s energy future is safe, equitable, and rooted in the realities of everyday life.

If the country hopes to build energy systems that endure, it must begin by widening the circle of who decides.