4th WePOWER Conference Edition

WePOWER

WePOWER Assessment 2024-25

Women's Jobs in the South Asia Power Sector

SUMMARY REPORT

Voices from the workplace

START HERE

Introduction

The South Asia Region's power sector has made the inclusion of women in its workforce a visible priority, catalyzed by the South Asia Women in Power Sector Professional Network's (WePOWER) targeted interventions. WePOWER seeks to increase women's participation in energy sector jobs, especially in technical and managerial positions. Over the last five years, WePOWER Partners have catalyzed significant change in the participation, retention, and advancement of women in the energy sector across South Asia. This study draws on extensive data from more than **30 power sector utilities,** including over **2,000 employee surveys** and more than 200 hours of interviews with **871 participants through 171 individual and group discussions.** As WePOWER steers toward establishing a permanent regional secretariat and Partner-led national chapters, this brief offers a thorough analysis of WePOWER's impact and recommendations for future directions.

WePOWER's impact is evident: the network helps Partners advance gender equity through a **clear action framework** and **active knowledge exchange. Its Five Pillar Framework,** emphasis on data and target setting, and sharing of good practices have become powerful and practical tools for shaping organizational culture and influencing sector policy. WePOWER Partners are adopting gender policies, building on-site daycares, providing flexible working arrangements, and improving fieldwork and training opportunities, reflecting the network's influence. There is now greater visibility for women in technical and leadership roles, alongside increased awareness of the barriers they face. Expanded training and knowledge-sharing opportunities, including initiatives such as SAR100 and Shokti Konna, further demonstrate WePOWER's role in convening Partners and advancing gender equity and inclusion across the power sector. Employment data from utilities indicate **meaningful gains** resulting from **proactive recruitment** and **outreach efforts** by WePOWER Partners.

Partners have recommended that WePOWER **increase outreach and expand its activities,** which are currently concentrated in central offices and among technical staff. Key recommendations include broadening the scope of WePOWER's activities to be more inclusive, particularly by involving non-technical staff and men who may face similar challenges and can benefit from the program's offerings. Encouragingly, there is broad recognition among both women and men across all career levels that increasing women's participation in the energy sector is vital. Everyone can benefit from access to more training and career development opportunities.

Women's Representation in the South Asia Energy Sector – 2024/5 Survey Findings

Across the South Asia Region (SAR) in 2024/5, women's representation in the Power sector varies widely, ranging from 3.7 to 24.4 percent for total staff, slightly lower 0.3 to 21.6 percent for total technical staff and 6 to 30 percent for staff in managerial roles.

- Bhutan recorded the highest percentage of women across all three categories, while the Maldives had the lowest percentage of women in technical roles with 0.3 percent, and Pakistan the lowest percentage of women overall, with 3.7 percent.

- The percentage of women in managerial positions varies widely. Bhutan leads with nearly 30 percent of managers being women, followed by Sri Lanka at 24 percent and Nepal at 13 percent. By contrast, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan remain at only 6–7 percent.

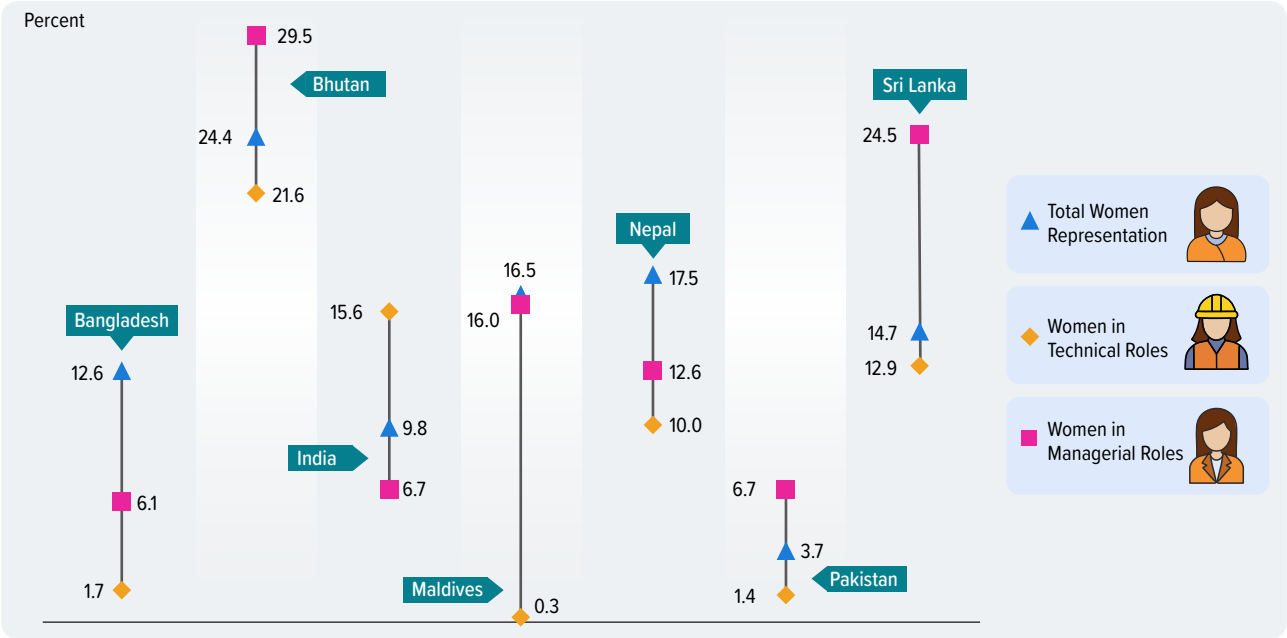
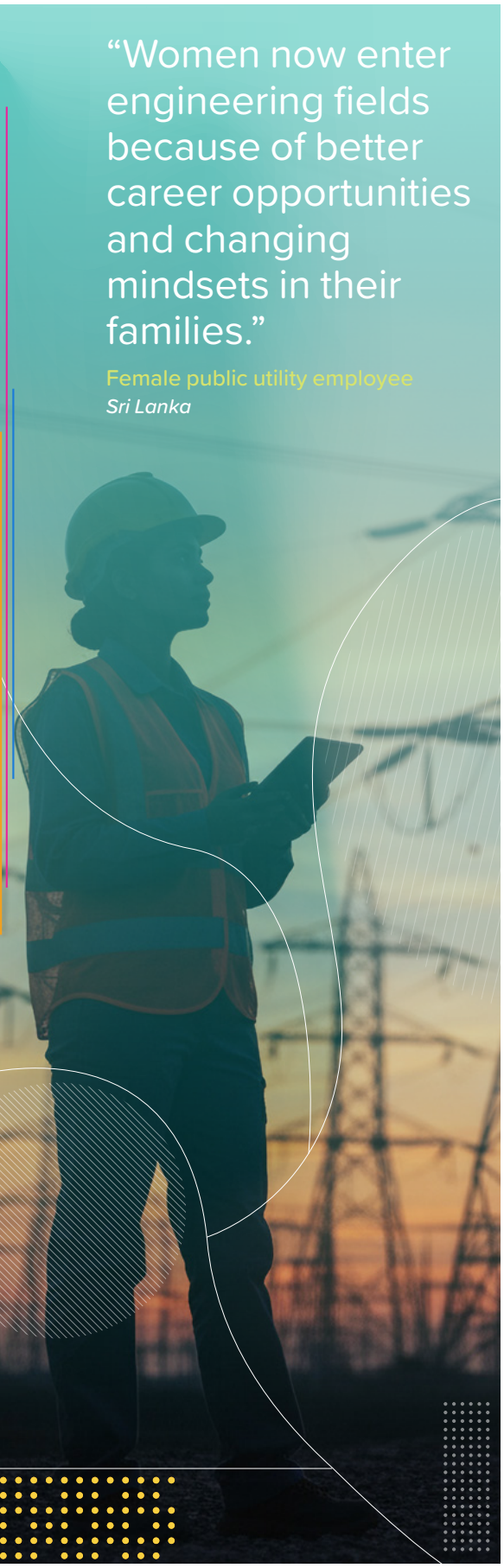


Chart 1: Women's Representation in the SAR Power Sector

Recruitment has increased the number of women in the sector: Between 2022 and 2024, a total of 1,537 women were hired by the surveyed organizations—around 10 percent of all new hires—with 478 in technical and 560 for non-technical roles. This mirrors women's current representation in the workforce but highlights the challenge of scaling up recruitment.

Promotion opportunities remain limited: Women accounted for just 6 percent of staff promotions, and only 4 percent in technical roles. While some female staff hold advanced degrees, women still represent a smaller share of technical degree holders overall. However, the alignment between technical education and employment is notable: in many organizations, nearly all women with technical degrees are placed in in technical roles. For example, in Bhutan's Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC), all 101 women with technical degrees are assigned to technical roles. Similarly, in Bangladesh's Dhaka Power Distribution Co. (DPDC), the 29 women holding technical positions are also placed accordingly.



"Women now enter engineering fields because of better career opportunities and changing mindsets in their families."

Female public utility employee
Sri Lanka

Progress since the 2019/20 WePOWER Baseline Assessment

The WePOWER Baseline Assessment was conducted in 2019-20.[1] The data from the utilities that participated in the 2020 and 2024/5 surveys recorded an increase in percentage of women, typically in the range of 1-3 percent with the total number of women increasing from 13,670 to 15,713. The overall **employment of women in the power sector rose** from **9 to 9.3 percent**. There has been an increase in the number of women working in both technical and managerial roles, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and political uncertainties experienced during this period. Employment in the Energy sector has expanded largely due to the growing demand for the economies in SAR. The data shows that women are at least keeping place or making narrow gains in overall representation in the Power sector workforce.

- **Bhutan and Nepal stand out for their comparatively high and growing female participation.** In Bhutan, women now make up **21.6 percent of technical staff,** up from 16.1 percent in 2020 (389 to 489), with overall representation among the highest in the region. Nepal's progress is driven largely by the Nepal Electricity Authority, where women's overall share rose from 12.6 to 17.5 percent, and the percentage of technical women increased from 6 to 10 (351 to 558).

- **India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives show incremental improvements.** India's **female participation grew from 8 to 9.8 percent.** NTPC, with the largest workforce among the public utilities, employs 1,363 women out of 18,163 staff, including 614 female engineers among 14,609 technical employees. Sri Lanka's overall female share increased 12.7 to 14.7 percent, though technical roles remain stagnant, only growing from 14.7 to 14.9 percent. The Maldives achieved a slight increase from 15 to 16.5 percent overall, but women remain almost absent in technical roles or jobs, with just 7 across two utilities, making up just 0.07 percent of all technical staff.

- **In contrast, while Bangladesh and Pakistan have made progress in women's employment, these gains have been eclipsed by the broader surge in overall workforce recruitment. Pakistan nearly doubled the number of women in technical roles** (381 to 689), but their share fell from 4.8 to 3.5 percent primarily because of a surge in male hiring. In Bangladesh, over the past five years, the total number of employees increased by 20 percent. However, women's overall workforce representation fell from 9.5 to 6.2 percent. The overall share within technical staff declined from 3.1 to 2.4 percent.

1 Pathways to Power: South Asia Region Baseline Assessment for Women Engineers in the Power Sector (English). Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP) Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/425391580298974587

Gender Norms: Shifting Attitudes and Persistent Barriers

Changing societal attitudes and family support are driving a qualitative shift in norms. There is growing awareness of gender inclusivity, with more women entering fields such as civil, electrical and mechanical engineering. **"Mindsets have improved in recent years regarding women in the Power sector,"** said an employee from Nepal. Echoing what many respondents noted, a CEB employee acknowledged that parents are increasingly encouraging girls to pursue STEM education: "Parents' knowledge has changed. In those days, the doctor is a girl, the boy is an engineer. Now it is different." Women are now more visible as engineers, technicians, and operators in power plants, reflecting both changing perceptions and deliberate organizational strategies.

The impact of changing norms is visible in the increasing number of women joining the sector and breaking traditional barriers. "In my community, people used to say girls shouldn't go to far-off jobs. Now they tell their daughters, 'She's doing it, you can too'," shared a female utility employee in India. "Women are now accepted as engineers and technicians in the Power sector, which was not the case a decade ago," said a manager from Nepal. WePOWER's outreach has increased interest in the sector. As noted by a male employee from a Sri Lankan utility, "Social media and awareness campaigns have made a difference. Young girls now see role models in the sector and believe they can do it, too."

Analysis of the qualitative data found that most comments on social norms – about 84 percent – described positive change. Both men and women respondents emphasized that **women are now more accepted, more visible, and more widely seen as competent professionals.** Chart 1 presents how often positive change themes were mentioned

"They used to think women couldn't run the plant. Now we do all three shifts—even the night ones."

Female public utility employee
India

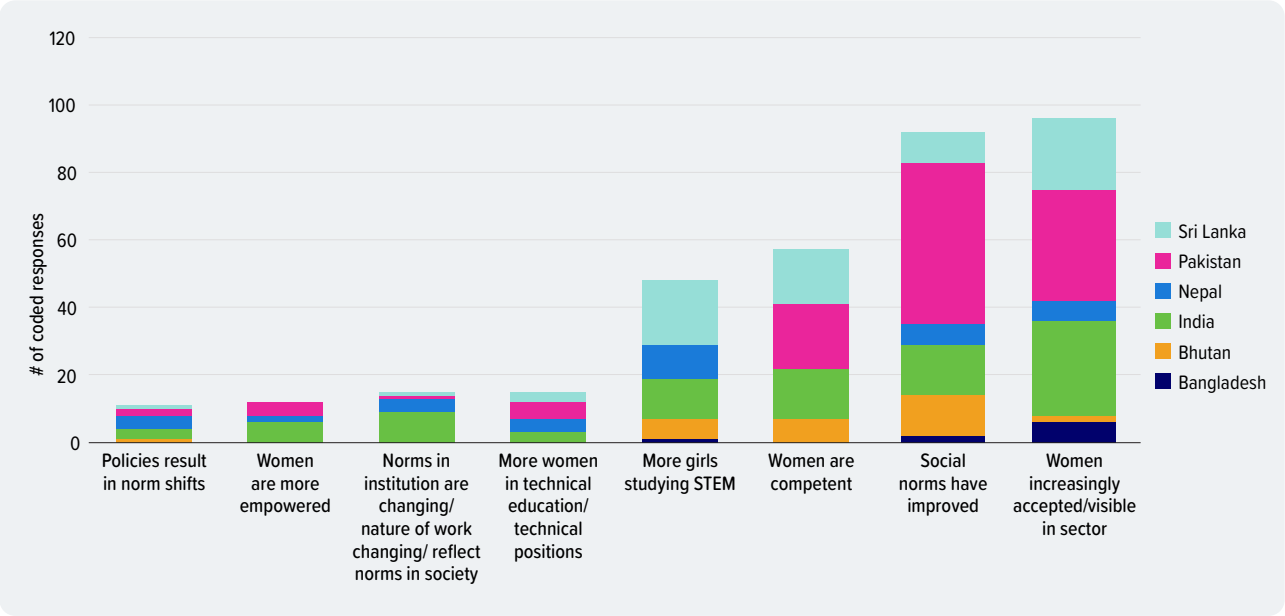


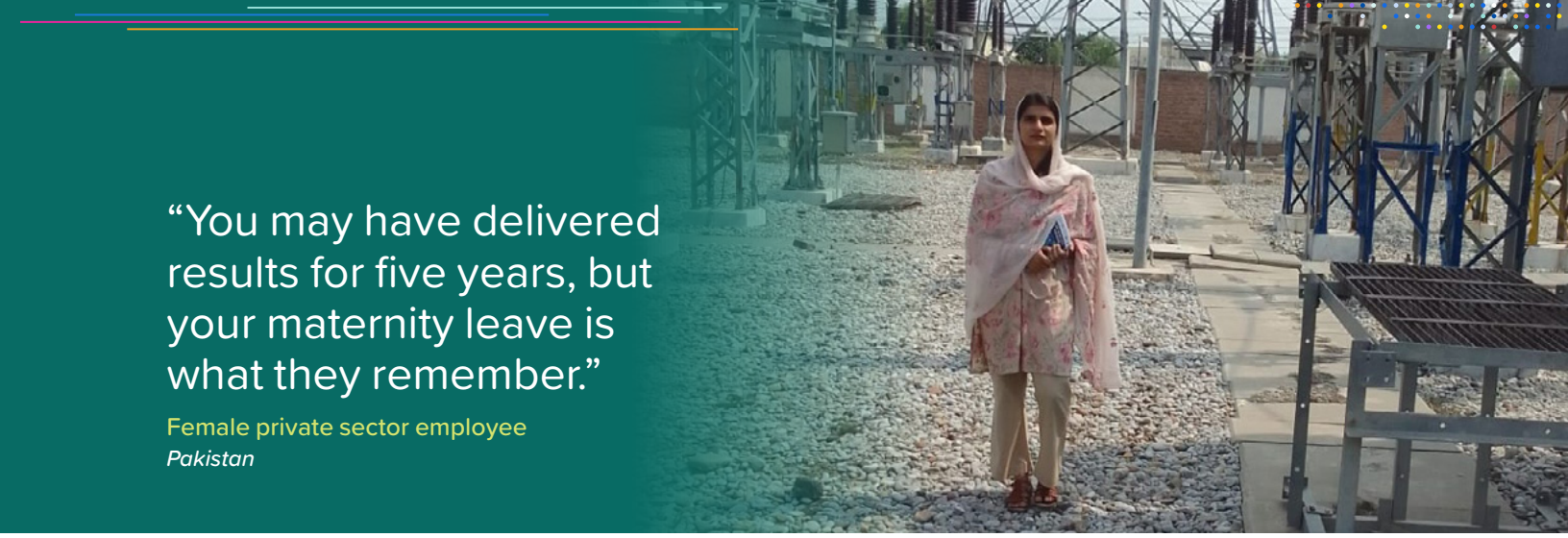
Chart 2: Key enablers for changing social norms - breakdown of coded qualitative data

by each country in interviews and focus groups, based on coded qualitative responses rather than survey percentages. The largest share of responses related to broad improvements in social norms and the growing visibility of women in the sector, followed by recognition of women's competence and more girls pursuing STEM or technical education. By contrast, only a small number of responses explicitly linked norm changes to institutional policies or empowerment programs, highlighting that the most visible progress to date has come from shifts in attitudes and representation, rather than from formal institutional policies.

Despite these positive changes, persistent "sticky" societal gender norms and biases continue to hinder women's career progression, especially in technical and field-based roles. Three interconnected barriers clearly emerge from the data in terms of the most discussed**:** the **dual burden of work** and **caregiving** responsibilities at home (29 percent), the **nature of technical/field** assignments requiring frequent travel (27 percent), and the inadequate protection against **harassment and safety concerns** (16 percent).

Across most countries, the dual burden of paid work and caregiving emerged as the most frequently cited barrier to women's advancement in the energy sector, rooted in a powerful cultural code that continues to cast women primarily as caretakers of children and the home. Women respondents typically stressed that this burden is structural rather than personal, noting that even with family support, expectations remain relentless. As a female engineer in Bangladesh explained, **"My husband is very supportive... But at the same time, he wants me to be a good mother too... I'm not Goddess Durga, and I can't do everything!"** Male colleagues, however, tended to interpret these roles as natural limitations rather than societal constructs, as one Sri Lankan respondent reflected: "When a female starts a family, the attention and care toward children should be there. So, we should balance work and family life. That may be a little difficult." These perspectives highlight how entrenched norms around women's domestic responsibilities, reinforced by both family and workplace cultures, continue to undermine women's career progression despite their capabilities and ambitions.

Another major barrier raised across the region relates to the demanding nature of technical and field assignments. These roles often require irregular hours, frequent travel, and physically intensive tasks, which many male supervisors view as unsafe or unsuitable for women. As one male respondent in Sri Lanka explained, "Risk involvement such as climbing on posts and other dangerous work is never seen as women's work. It does not match with our culture." Another added, "Fieldwork in Power requires constant travel and sometimes late hours, which is challenging for women due to cultural norms." Women, however, frequently countered this view, emphasizing that the work itself is not beyond their



> "You may have delivered results for five years, but your maternity leave is what they remember."
>
> Female private sector employee
> *Pakistan*

abilities; rather, they are held back by cultural restrictions and assumptions about what women can or should do. As one female employee in India observed: **"It's just assumed that women can't go to the field or handle shutdowns or emergencies. No one asks if we even want to try."** Similarly, a respondent in Nepal reflected on a colleague's experience: "Nowadays, women are increasingly interested in working at sites. Recently, we had three female interns, all of whom worked on-site. One even applied for a site-based position and was selected. However, she ultimately couldn't take the job because her parents didn't allow her to go."

Alongside caregiving and the demanding nature of technical work, safety and harassment concerns were reported as a major barrier limiting women's participation in the Power sector across South Asia. Women repeatedly pointed to insecure field environments, the risk of harassment, and the absence of safe transport and accommodation as reasons they are discouraged from technical and site-based roles. In Bangladesh, one engineer noted that "society isn't ready to accept educated middle-class women working outdoors, standing on ladders beside male co-workers. And safety concerns remain a big barrier." In Bhutan and Nepal, respondents stressed the lack of safe transport and facilities in remote postings, with one Nepali staff member noting, **"Traveling alone to remote sites is a significant barrier, especially with the lack of secure accommodations."** In Pakistan, women emphasized that harassment often goes unreported due to stigma and lack of confidentiality: "Sometimes women don't even report harassment because they feel nothing will happen, or they'll be blamed." These accounts show how risks to women's physical safety, combined with cultural norms that question their presence in public or male-dominated spaces, continue to undermine their opportunities to participate fully in the sector.

Another key barrier evident in the data is occupational segregation driven – paternalism is frequently used to steer women into "safer and more comfortable" administrative or desk-based roles, which keeps them out of technical and field assignments. This pattern was most visible in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India. In Nepal and Bhutan, women spoke less about segregation and more about internalized constraints and family pressures that shaped their career choices. In both cases, the result is the same: women's technical pathways are restricted, and their contributions are undervalued. As one engineer in Bangladesh recalled, "When I joined here, I was given non-technical work at the office. I tried to express my interest to my previous boss... but I was told, 'You won't be able to do it. Can you go to the site at midnight?'" Even when women break into technical roles, they are often expected to shoulder additional office duties. A Sri Lankan participant explained, "Even when women do the same work as men, they are still expected to handle administrative duties in addition to their core technical roles." In Bhutan, a woman with five years of hydropower experience described how the management diverted her skills: "When management visited, women were expected to attend late-night dinners or take on reception duties instead of being recognized for their technical roles." These accounts highlight how gendered assumptions and workplace practices continue to confine women to support functions rather than enabling them to progress along core technical and leadership tracks.

In addition to formal barriers such as caregiving demands, safety concerns, and occupational segregation, women also face subtler but equally damaging disadvantages through heightened scrutiny and exclusion from informal networks. Respondents noted that women's technical competence is often questioned, with mistakes judged more

> “We cannot send the females anywhere independently due to the culture; we are bound.”
>
> Male public utility manager
> *Pakistan*

harshly than men’s. As one female engineer in Bhutan put it, “Even when women excel academically, there’s still a belief that they aren’t as capable in technical roles as men.” A woman in Sri Lanka added, “Women engineers still have to prove their capability more than men. A mistake made by a woman is scrutinized much more than if a man made the same mistake.” Women also described being left out of the informal spaces where trust is built and decisions are shaped. As one respondent explained, “Informal meetings after work are where decisions are often made, but women are rarely included.” Another reflected, **“Household duties are always in the back of our minds, and we can’t stay for informal gatherings or parties that help in career growth.”** A participant in Nepal similarly noted that domestic responsibilities leave women with “less chance to extend their professional networking.” Together, these accounts show how cultural expectations and workplace norms combine not only to restrict women’s formal opportunities but also to deny them access to the informal networks that often determine career progression.

Beyond these barriers, women across the region also highlighted significant challenges in advancing to leadership roles, often citing biased hiring and promotion practices, limited training opportunities, and persistent doubts about their capabilities. In India, one woman explained, “There’s always a doubt about whether we’re actually qualified. It’s like we have to prove our skills twice over.” A respondent from Pakistan similarly noted, “Sometimes promotions are delayed for women because senior managers think their performance is not up to the mark.” In Sri Lanka, women pointed to the way assumptions about family responsibilities limit their opportunities for advancement: **“We have to work twice as hard to prove ourselves**. Even if we perform better, promotions tend to go to men because it is assumed they can take on more responsibility.” In Nepal, frustrations centered both on missed promotions and restricted access to training: “Compared to male counterparts, we face barriers when participating in training opportunities. **Women must first ensure household responsibilities are managed before attending, while male staff can pack their bags and leave without hesitation.”** In Bhutan, doubts about women’s leadership potential remained widespread, as one

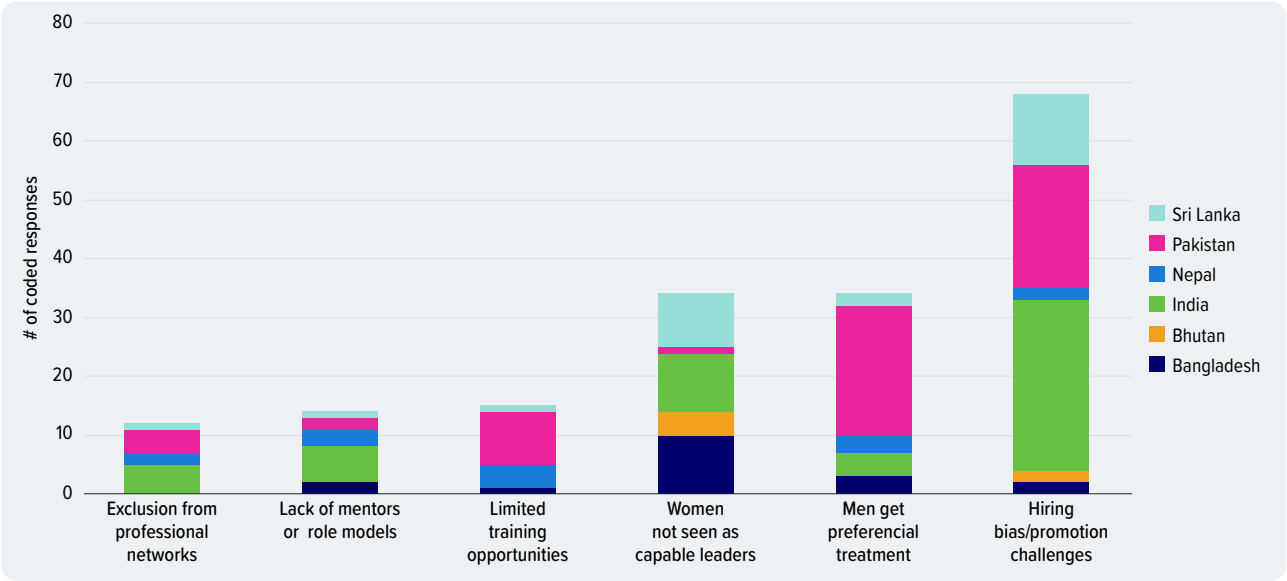


Chart 3: Barriers to advancement and leadership for women

respondent observed, "Women's capabilities as leaders are often underestimated, requiring them to work twice as hard as their male counterparts." And in Bangladesh, women reflected on the constant scrutiny they face when aspiring to advance: **"We have to constantly prove ourselves. Unlike men, we're always being tested, and the default is that we're not capable."** Chart 3 reinforces these accounts, showing how hiring and promotion challenges dominate concerns in India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, limited training opportunities are particularly pressing in Nepal, and doubts about women's leadership capacity remain most salient in Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Overall, the qualitative data analysis is consistent with findings from interviews, participant interactions, and the general gender development context in SAR. When prompted to speak about gender-related challenges, women clearly described persistent difficulties. As illustrated in the coding map (Figure 1), two core issues emerge: the dual burden of caregiving responsibilities and the nature of technical/field assignments with irregular work schedules and travel. These, in turn, contribute to a web of other barriers – including perceptions that women are less capable or committed, inadequate facilities tailored to women's needs, and institutional inaction in the face of safety risks.

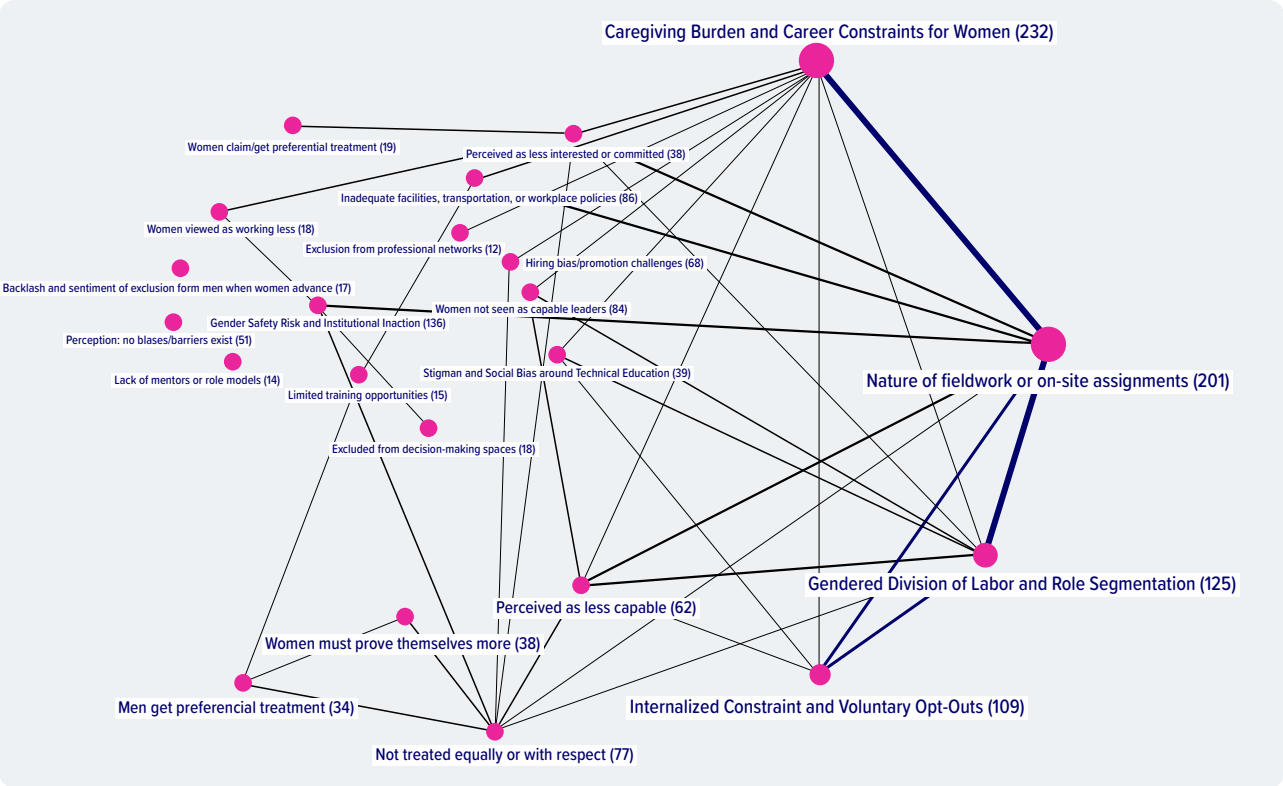


Figure 1: Coding map of challenges to women's career in the Energy sector

"We're told not to complain or ask for help—because it makes us look incapable."

Female public utility employee
India

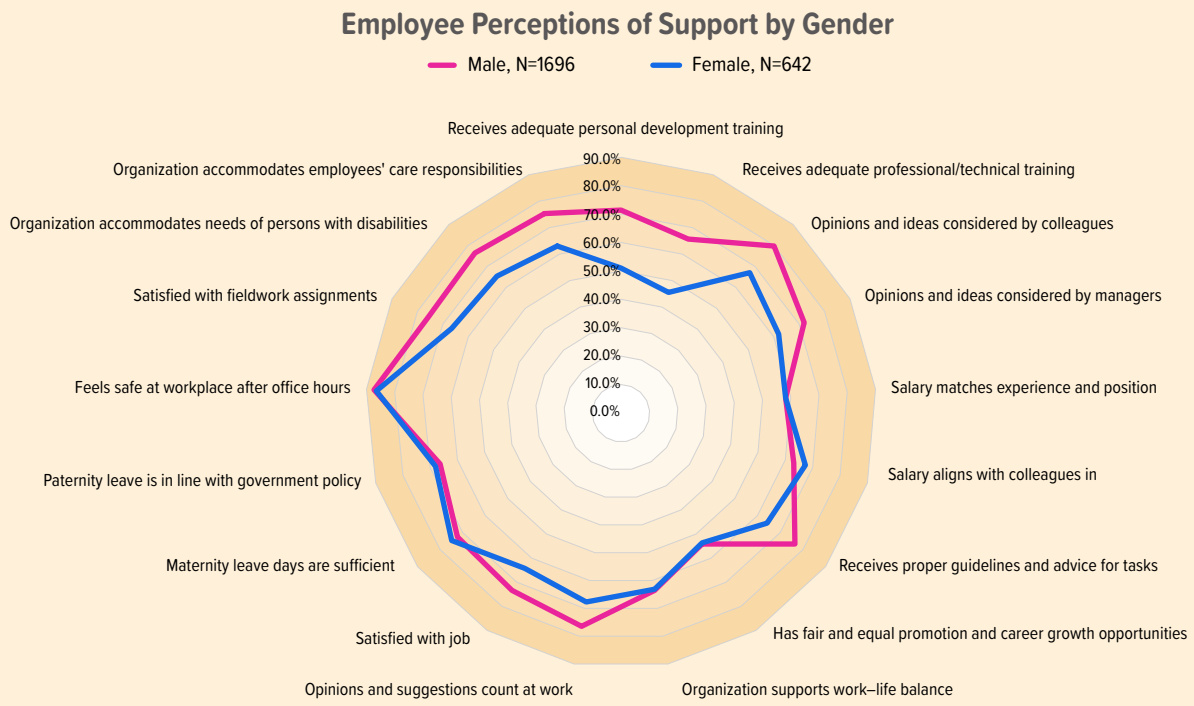
WePOWER Employee Perception Survey – Career Experiences in the Sector

This section presents the findings from the WePOWER Employee Survey was conducted in 2024 to collect the work experience of the women and men who work in the energy sector. The results reinforce the findings from the qualitative analysis conducted for the study that women tend to encounter a less supportive workplace compared to men - as reflected by the smaller radar area for women's radar charts. It is important to note that, despite existing gender gaps, a substantial proportion of both women and men believe that workplace conditions have the potential for improvement.

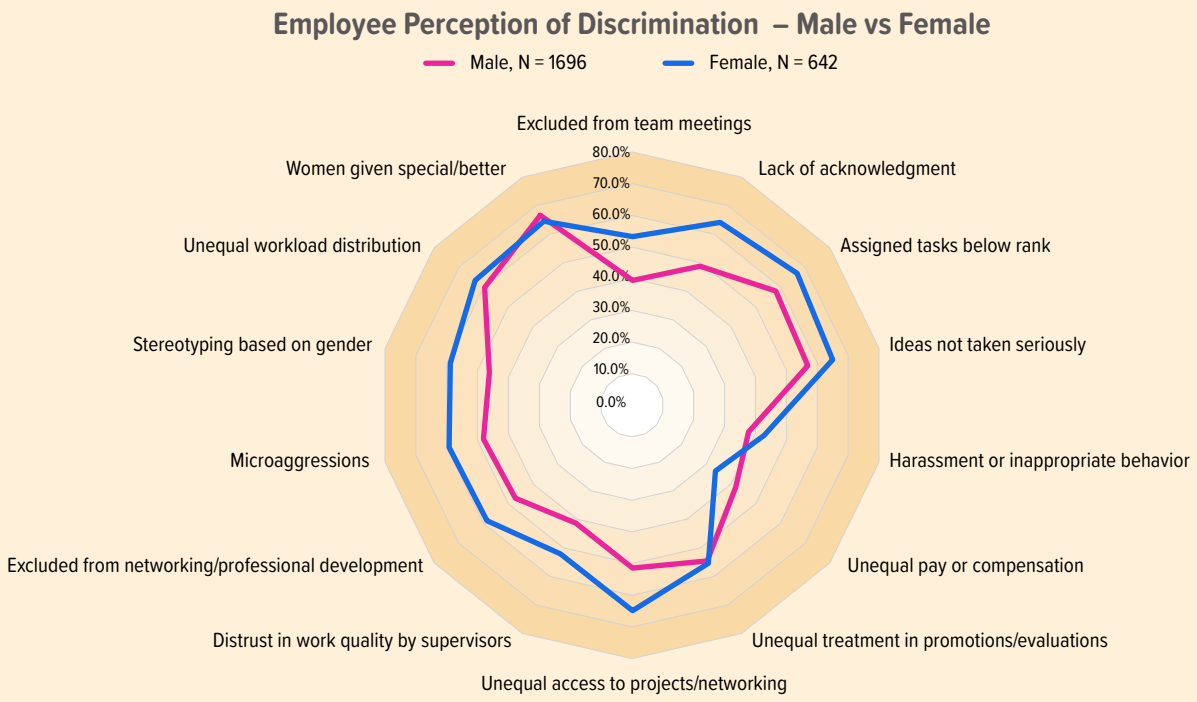
The most pronounced gender gaps cluster on access and opportunity, 65% of women report unequal access to training and advancement opportunities compared to 51% of men, and 59% of women report exclusion from networking and professional development opportunities versus 47% of men. The results validate the broader qualitative findings and priorities recommendations form the study about the lack of professional/technical development opportunities and unconscious bias in the workplace, which further reinforces the importance of WePOWER activities in addressing these barriers.

Note on Methodology:

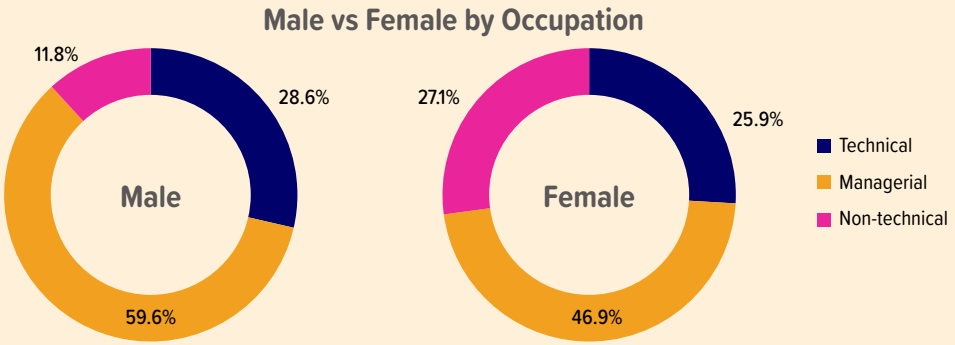
A total of **2,355 total survey respondents,** 652 (27.7%) were women, reflecting strong female participation in the SAR power sector employee survey given their low representation in the SAR energy sector. Please see the country briefs for more detailed country specific findings from the employee survey.



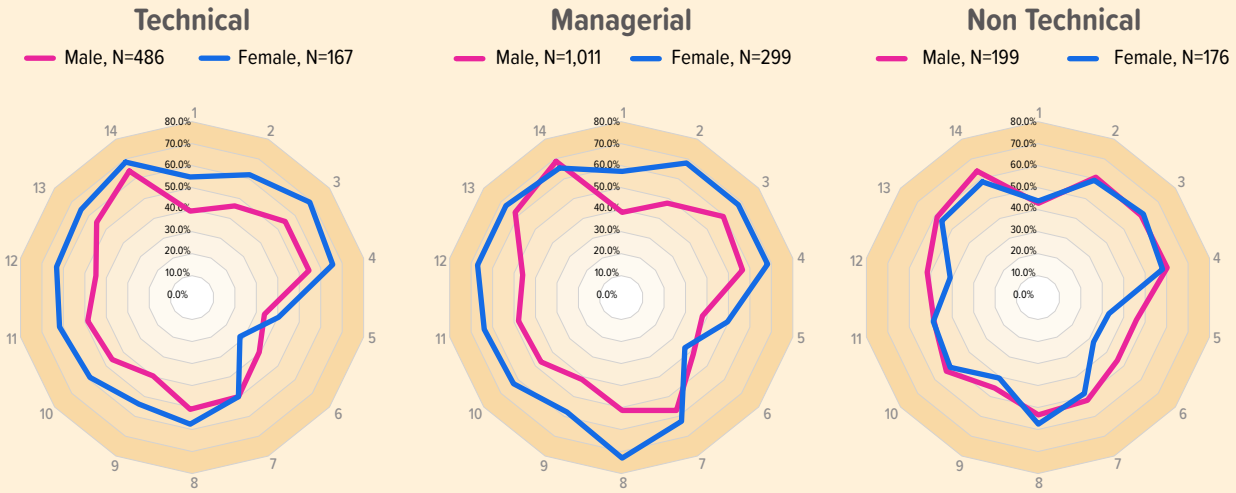
When examining specifically employee perceptions of discrimination, other areas with notable gender gaps emerge, which center around recognition, voice, and access. On recognition and voice, the greatest disparity appears in lack of acknowledgment, reported by 64% of women compared to 49% of men reporting. Women are also more likely to report that their ideas are not taken seriously, pointing to a pattern of weaker visibility in the workplace. The gender gaps center around being assigned tasks below rank, stereotyping based on gender, and microaggressions, highlighting potential effects on morale at the workplace.



Further insights can be gained by examining the data by occupation category. Women are more concentrated in non-technical roles than men (27.1% vs. 11.8%), and this compositional difference is accompanied by meaningful differences in how workplace discrimination is experienced across roles. As shown in the radar charts, patterns of reported discrimination vary across occupation categories, with notable differences in both the magnitude and direction of gender gaps depending on occupational role. (see charts below).



The gender gap is most evident in managerial and technical jobs, as shown by larger chart areas. This highlights that women experience greater isolation as they advance in their careers compared to those in non-technical positions. In contrast, non-technical occupations show a much narrower gender gap, with men and women reporting similar rates across indicators and fewer overall instances. This may be because these roles are more office-based, possibly suggesting a more supportive environment.



1. Excluded from team meetings
2. Lack of acknowledgment
3. Assigned tasks below rank
4. Ideas not taken seriously
5. Harassment or inappropriate behavior
6. Unequal pay or compensation
7. Unequal treatment in promotions/evaluations
8. Unequal access to projects/networking
9. Distrust in work quality by supervisors
10. Excluded from networking/professional development
11. Microaggressions
12. Stereotyping based on gender
13. Unequal workload distribution
14. Women given special/better

Men report unequal pay more often than women in technical and management roles (40% vs. 29%, 42% vs. 37%). Men also frequently cite “women given special or better treatment” across all occupations, which may their sense of exclusion from specialized training and networking under WePOWER, as was found in the qualitative research. In non-technical roles, men report equal or higher rates of harassment (46% vs. 33%), unequal pay (46% vs. 32%), and gender stereotyping (52% vs. 41%), which is less common in other occupation categories.

Institutional Responses and Emerging Good Practices

Across South Asia, utilities and Energy organizations are beginning to respond to long-standing gender gaps with new policies and practices aimed at recruitment, retention, and professional development. While progress is uneven and challenges remain, these efforts mark an important shift in institutional culture. From targeted hiring and family-friendly policies to training, mentorship, and safety measures, organizations are taking deliberate steps to expand women's opportunities and create more supportive work environments. The following sections highlight key areas where change is taking place, illustrating both promising practices and persistent gaps that shape women's experiences in the sector.

Recruitment: Hard-Fought Gains and Innovative Practices

Recruitment has been one of the most visible entry points for change, with organizations adopting measures to bring more women into the workforce. Quotas, gender-balanced shortlisting, and bias-reducing hiring practices are beginning to challenge entrenched norms and expand the talent pipeline. While women remain underrepresented overall, these initiatives demonstrate how deliberate recruitment strategies can make a measurable difference in women's participation, particularly in technical and leadership tracks.

In the Power sector across SAR countries and participating organizations, men constitute the majority of both overall full-time employees and technical staff. Women make up only 9 percent of the total full-time workforce and just **3.1 percent of technical personnel.**

Women have a slightly higher presence in part-time roles, accounting for 10.3 percent of all part-time positions and 5 percent of part-time technical roles. A total of **23,200 female staff members** were reported across the surveyed organizations, reflecting the current scale of women's engagement in the Power sector workforce.

70 percent of utilities have adopted gender non-discrimination policies, and close to 87 percent have policies to prevent gender-based violence and harassment. Nearly all institutions provide maternity leave; 68 percent provide paternity leaves while nearly 74 percent also extend paid family and medical leave, reflecting a strong uptake of protective benefits.

Just over half the institutions, at 53 percent, report having a gender equity strategy, framework and/or action plan, while 39 percent have introduced **flexible work arrangements.** Overall, 7 out of the 11 utilities adopted gender policies after joining WePOWER.

By contrast, recruitment policies targeting women are adopted by only 26 percent of institutions. 21 percent of institutions have set formal targets or quotas for women, and **5 percent have promotion policies tailored for women.** Furthermore, performance management systems and frameworks typically lack defined gender-related objectives.

Organizations are implementing quotas and gender-balanced shortlisting to drive change. MEPCO in Pakistan mandated its HR team with ensuring that at least 20% of new recruits are women. The HR Director from MEPCO explained that the "quota for women has increased their representation in our workforce from 1.8% to 3.1% in five years." The HR Manager from NTPC in India noted that "in our organization, the HR policy includes a clause that mandates gender balance in shortlisting. **Even if the applicant pool is small, we proactively seek out qualified women."** As one female NTPC employee explained: "We removed interviews and now recruit based on GATE ranks—this avoids bias."[2] BSES Yamuna in India advertises vacancies through women's engineering colleges and alumni groups. MEPCO maintains a 50-50 split for women and men interns.

The impact of these practices is visible in the changing composition of the workforce. As one DGPC manager noted, "The emphasis on academic performance during recruitment has led to more women getting opportunities in technical fields." A CEB manager added, "In recent years, our department has made efforts to hire more female engineers. Now, there are more women than before, especially in planning roles." Even private companies like ENGRO Energy in Pakistan is prioritizing hiring women in technical fields, which was "unheard of before," and NWEDC in Nepal is using "vacancy calls for 'women only' positions" to recruit more female engineers.

2 The Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) is a national-level examination in India that assesses knowledge of engineering and science subjects. Public sector organizations often use GATE scores for direct recruitment to technical positions, providing a standardized and merit-based selection process.

Family-Friendly Policies: Supporting Women's Retention and Advancement

Family-friendly policies have become a critical lever for retaining women in the Power sector and enabling their advancement into leadership roles. While maternity leave is widely established across South Asia, organizations are beginning to expand support through paternity leave, childcare facilities, lactation rooms, and flexible work arrangements. These measures are especially important in a sector where long hours, field postings, and cultural expectations around caregiving often push women to leave the workforce. Yet the reach of such policies remains uneven—stronger at headquarters than in field sites—and their effectiveness is shaped not only by availability but also by workplace culture and social acceptance.

50 percent of responding utilities had **childcare facilities** in HQ, but only 30 percent reported the facility in field offices and 17 percent in the project sites/plants. 10 percent of the utilities provided monetary assistance in lieu of childcare if the facility is not available for their employees.

Similarly, 53 percent of responding utilities had **lactation facilities** in HQ, compared to 21 percent in field and project sites/plants respectively. All countries follow their paid maternity leave policies of the country/government. Only Bangladesh does not have any paid paternity leave policy.

42 percent of responding utilities offer **flexible work arrangements** to their employees. These arrangements primarily consist of part-time employment and flexible core hours or compressed work schedules.

Pakistan reported the greatest number of organizations **offering workplace accessibility and childcare facilities.** With the highest number of participating organizations, it has the highest proportion of headquarters accessible for people with disabilities (91 percent). Pakistan also offers the most comprehensive childcare support with 82 percent of organizations providing child-care centers at headquarters and 27 percent offering monetary assistance in the absence of facilities.

Family-friendly policies are essential for supporting working mothers and promoting inclusivity, with maternity leave and flexible work arrangements becoming more common. Maternity leave is well-established across the region. AEPC in Nepal offers "98 days of paid maternity leave and an additional six months of unpaid leave if needed." In Sri Lanka, CEB provides up to six months of maternity leave with no salary deductions, and some organizations offer paternity leave. One employee explained, "Our maternity leave is given thrice in a lifetime—six months for the first, four for the second, and one for the third. This support really helps." Another added, **"We even have paternity leave, and men are encouraged to take it."**

Flexible work arrangements are increasingly available, helping women balance professional and family responsibilities. NEA in Nepal introduced shift duties for women in sub-stations, and some organizations allow women to work from home for a few days when needed. “We offer flexibility in working hours for women, especially those facing medical or family challenges,” said one manager. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women were allowed to leave early, though this created tension among male staff on some occasions.

Childcare support is emerging as a critical need, with some organizations establishing daycare centers. As one female employee described, “The establishment of a daycare center represents a significant shift in norms...employees can charge a third party managing it, similar to the gym in the building.” Another manager noted, “We are striving to establish a daycare center in this building to enhance the quality of work and peace of mind for women.” **However, in rural offices, childcare support is rare, forcing women to rely on informal networks or quit work.**

Despite these advances, challenges remain in the implementation and acceptance of family-friendly policies. Support from family members is often crucial, as one employee shared, “The biggest support I had was my mother-in-law. Without her, I couldn’t have continued.” Another woman recounted: “Work doesn’t stop when you go home. You’re cooking, helping kids, and still thinking about office emails.” Some women said they feel stigmatized for taking leave: “Policies exist but taking leave means being labeled as weak or less ambitious.” Societal attitudes can also be a barrier, as a female engineer recounted, “When I said I wanted to work at the power plant site, my relatives were shocked. ‘You’ll work with linemen? With male staff? At night?’ That’s the reaction.”

Training and Capacity Building: Empowering Women for Technical and Leadership Roles

Training and capacity building play a vital role in preparing women for technical and leadership positions, yet participation remains limited across the region. While some organizations are investing in targeted programs and initiatives, women continue to face barriers in accessing both technical and leadership training. At the same time, emerging examples of tailored programs demonstrate how structured opportunities can strengthen women’s skills, confidence, and career progression.

In the 24 months preceding the survey, a total of **86,000 staff across the participating** organizations received technical training, including STEM topics related to operations and field-based operational training. This includes 6,180 women (26.6% of all women employees) and 79,820 men (34.1% of all men employees).

A significant gender disparity in field-based technical training opportunities is evident, with women accounting for only 2% of total trainees. Overall, **41% of technical women receiving training** compared to 56% of technical men.

During the 24-month period prior to the survey, **68% of responding utilities provided leadership training for their staff.** A total of 2,634 individuals participated in these programs, of which only 325 were women, accounting for 12 percent, underscoring the limited participation of women in leadership development initiatives.

NTPC in India and KE in Pakistan are offering full range of trainings as well as scholarships for additional degrees or certifications to employees. Both organizations also have highest number of female staff in senior management positions.

WePOWER has significantly contributed to capacity building, enhancing technical skills, leadership, and confidence among women in the Energy sector. Training programs have been instrumental in building women's confidence and technical expertise. For example, the SAR100 training program connected 209 women engineers across South Asia, fostering ongoing knowledge sharing and interaction. "The SAR100 training program by WePOWER had a significant impact on strengthening our professional and networking skills," explained a participant from Nepal. "We are still in a WhatsApp group where we help each other solve technical issues—that is powerful support," added a participant from India.

Organizations are investing in targeted technical and leadership development programs. BSES Yamuna in India launched a two-year talent program for both technical and non-technical staff, with women engineers participating in modules on AI, data analytics, and operational leadership. ENGRO Energy in Pakistan trained 21 women technicians in maintenance roles, providing transport and urban accommodation to ease access for women working in remote plants. AEPC in Nepal implemented a UNDP-funded "technology promoter" model, training rural women in house wiring and masonry, then supporting them to train others. NTPC in India links STEM training to CSR initiatives, supporting career growth via skill labs.

Despite progress, women still face challenges in accessing training and development opportunities. Female participation in development activities remains lower than desired. "Female participation in development (trainings, capacity building) is less... I remember in one GESI training organized by Nepal Engineer's Association, no one was selected by the management. The opportunity was missed," said an NEA employee. In Pakistan, a female MEPCO employee observed, "I noticed a troubling trend where male colleagues were being prioritized for training opportunities over their female counterparts." Some women hold themselves back from applying for managerial positions due to fear of not performing well, and others are left out of specialized technical training, such as SCADA and smart metering.

Mentorship: Building Confidence and Networks

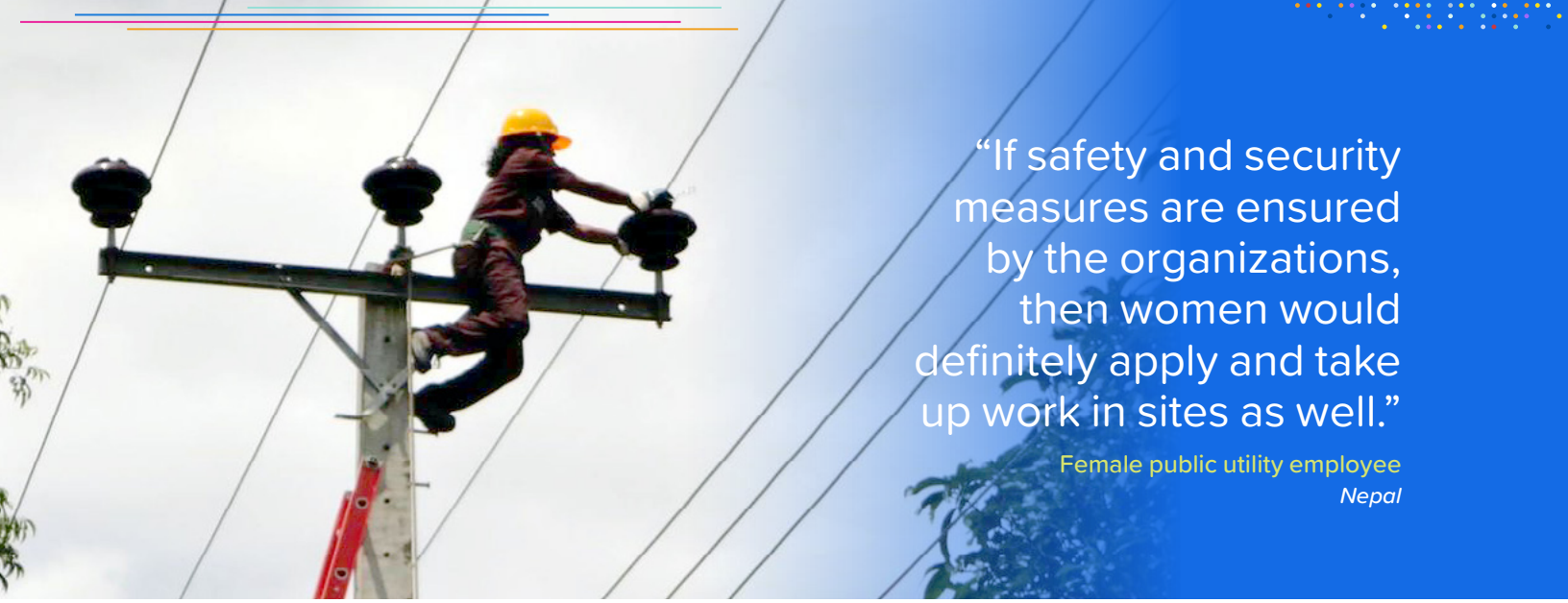
Mentorship has emerged as an important mechanism to support women's retention and advancement in the energy sector. While still limited—only 29 percent of responding utilities reported offering formal programs—mentorship opportunities are proving valuable in helping women build confidence, develop technical and leadership skills, and access professional networks that might otherwise remain closed to them.

29 percent of the utilities offered some form of **mentorship programs,** with approximately 16 percent being women mentees.

Mentorship programs are recognized as a crucial tool for guiding women's career progression, building confidence, and fostering a sense of community. Structured mentorship programs have helped women navigate career challenges and prepare for leadership roles. "Mentorship programs are a great way to support women's careers," said a male employee in Nepal. "WePOWER's mentorship program has significantly increased women's visibility and confidence in technical roles," added a female employee in Pakistan. For many, mentorship has been transformative: "The mentorship program was a turning point for me. It showed me that I'm not alone and that there's a network of women facing similar challenges." A female engineer from a transmission company in India shared: **"It gave us confidence. We learned what's happening across countries and it made us realize—we can lead, too".**

Challenges remain in the visibility of female role models and access to mentorship. "We don't see women in senior positions. If there are any, we don't know their stories," said a female utility employee. Another shared, "I had no female mentors coming up. Everything I learned, I learned by observing men." Exclusion from informal networks can also limit women's access to mentorship and career advancement: "You miss out on decisions made over tea breaks or after-hours chats where women aren't included."

Best practices include structured programs, peer networks, and engaging male mentors. "We have a structured mentorship programs to guide women into leadership roles, and to support women returning to work after career breaks," explained a female utility employee from Pakistan. Peer networks, such as those created by WePOWER's SAR100 program, enable ongoing interaction and learning. "WePOWER has connected women engineers across South Asia, enabling ongoing interaction and learning through initiatives like SAR100," said an NEA employee. Engaging male mentors is also important for fostering a balanced and supportive workplace culture.



"If safety and security measures are ensured by the organizations, then women would definitely apply and take up work in sites as well."

Female public utility employee
Nepal

Safety: Addressing Harassment and Field-Based Risks

Safety remains one of the most consistent concerns raised by women across South Asia's power sector, particularly in relation to harassment, late hours, and remote or field-based assignments. In response, many organizations have adopted policies and measures to reduce risks and redress complaints—ranging from anti-harassment committees to secure transport and lodging arrangements. These steps have begun to create safer and more enabling environments, though infrastructure gaps and cultural attitudes continue to limit women's full participation.

Overall 87 percent of organizations have established policies to **prevent gender-based violence and/or sexual harassment.** Overall, 71 percent have implemented a complaints committee or designated focal person and 66 percent possess formal grievance procedures. 47 percent of organizations employ CC Cameras, but only 34 percent report having a complaint box or comparable mechanism to ensure complainant anonymity.

For transportation facilities, 59 percent of utilities offered this service for women to/from offices, 60 percent to/from the project site(s), and 57 percent for after official hours from office to home.

50 percent of the responding utilities **offer separate lodging quarters/hostel facilities** for men and women outside of HQ.

36 percent of the utilities, mainly in India and Pakistan, held **gender sensitization/anti-sexual harassment/anti-discrimination** training for men and women. Approximately 90 percent of the participants were men.

From the surveyed respondents, **only 16 percent of women were based in field offices,** versus 45 percent of men. Almost half of the women respondents had the head office/HQ as their work location.

Safety concerns, particularly in field-based roles, are a significant barrier for women, but targeted measures are making workplaces safer. Organizations have introduced anti-harassment policies and safety measures to protect women, especially in remote and field-based roles. "A female engineer dedicated to fieldwork was provided security and a vehicle for night assignments after the Director introduced a rule for her protection. This encouraged others to join her," recounted a CEB employee. Another policy ensures that "female field officers are always paired with at least one other colleague when working in remote areas." Anti-harassment committees have made workplaces safer for women, especially in remote locations.

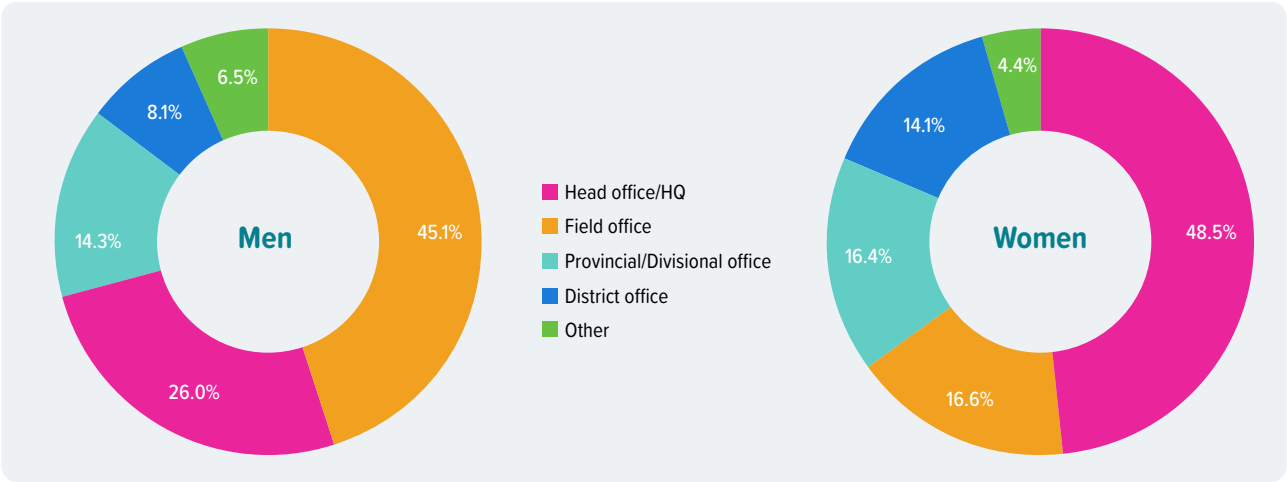


Chart 4: Work location for women and men staff in power utilities

Infrastructure gaps and societal attitudes continue to pose challenges. Infrastructure gaps (restrooms/transport/lodging) especially in the field, remain an issue although improvements are being made. Families are still hesitant to let women travel or stay late at work, though mindsets are slowly changing. "In our country, women hesitate to take these roles. There are sound hazards, night shifts, site visits—all of which make women feel hesitant to go," explained a chief engineer in Bangladesh. Fieldwork can be particularly challenging for women, as described by a Bhutanese technician: "Every month, technicians need to go house to house, climb poles, and change meters. These tasks can be challenging for women, especially when fieldwork requires carrying equipment and staying overnight in unfamiliar places."

The introduction of safety policies has encouraged more women to take on field roles. "The local director, recognizing the dangers she faced, imposed a rule that she must always be given security and a vehicle when going out at night." Safety measures have been introduced to protect women in field roles, including provisions for security and transportation during late hours. These efforts, though localized, help address concerns around harassment and safety. In Bhutan, the local director, recognizing the dangers his female subordinates could face. These measures have made it possible for more women to participate in fieldwork, though ongoing outreach to male employees is also important for sustaining change.

Awareness and Use of Anti-Harassment Policies

While many institutions have formal anti-harassment or PoSH policies in place, qualitative data reveals a persistent gap in awareness and understanding of how to access or activate these mechanisms. Respondents across multiple countries emphasized the importance of sustained awareness-raising, training, and cultural change to ensure policies are effective in practice.

- In **Sri Lanka,** a manager noted, "I believe there is a policy but it may not be well known to everybody. So, it is unclear for the victim where to go and what to do." Staff in FGDs confirmed that incidents are often handled informally or lead to women being transferred rather than action being taken against perpetrators.

- In **Bhutan**, an HR lead shared that despite initiating awareness sessions, she was perceived as "instigating" and faced backlash from senior male colleagues for confronting sexist attitudes on an internal committee. She stressed that "lack of awareness" was a key barrier to reporting and resolution, even among men who "don't realize what they are saying is harassment."

- In **India**, NTPC staff highlighted that harassment policy awareness was not a one-time orientation but a "recurrent feature." However, female employees at another plant expressed concern that "people don't know they are doing something wrong" and may not recognize inappropriate behavior as reportable harassment.

- In **Pakistan**, a MEPCO female respondent described how training on harassment policy was "done in Urdu," but added that internal committee members need further professional training to handle complaints properly. Elsewhere, a female staff member who tried to report misconduct noted the lack of confidentiality and retaliatory exclusion, underlining the risks women perceive in using formal channels.

- In **Nepal**, AEPC and Urja Developers have updated sexual harassment and GBV policies and conducted structured staff orientations, resulting in increased openness to report. One manager remarked that after field orientation, the organization received its first complaint, suggesting that awareness itself is a trigger for safer reporting.

These experiences underscore the need to:

Go beyond policy creation to routine, scenario-based sensitization for all staff.

Train harassment committee members with clear, survivor-centered guidelines.

Reaffirm confidentiality and protection for complainants.

Ensure that men and women understand the full spectrum of unacceptable behavior.

> "There needs to be a clear policy on sexual harassment, and it should be implemented properly, and not just on paper."
>
> - Female public utility employee
> *Sri Lanka*

Empowering Women in the Power Sector

WePOWER's engagement framework, branding, tools, and knowledge sharing of good practices from other utilities have been successfully leveraged by both female and male champions to engage senior management and advocate for small, incremental changes that have resulted in remarkable gains.

During the interviews, the respondents were overwhelmingly positive regarding WePOWER's role in mentorship, training, and increasing awareness about gender inclusivity. Analysis of the qualitative data is definitive. Over 90 percent of the coded discussion viewed **WePOWER as an effective tool to strengthen gender inclusion and empower women.** As illustrated in Chart 5, respondents most frequently described WePOWER's strength as its ability to **strengthen gender inclusivity across the sector,** followed by its role in **improving women's knowledge, skills, and career outcomes.** Many also emphasized that the network empowers women directly, **facilitates peer-to-peer exchange and professional networking,** and increases women's overall representation in the power sector workforce. Taken together, these findings highlight how WePOWER is valued not only for creating opportunities at the individual level but also for shaping institutional practices that make the sector more inclusive.

As shown in Chart 6, respondents suggested three main directions for strengthening the network's impact. First, many emphasized the importance of **strengthening efforts and impact,** calling for **more sustained and visible engagement** in member organizations. Second, **broadening the scope of activities** was highlighted, with respondents recommending more technical training, leadership development, and grassroots engagement. Finally, a significant share of comments focused on **expanding inclusion beyond women engineers** to also reach non-technical staff, men, and youth, thereby embedding a wider culture of gender equality across the sector. Indeed, 90 percent of the discussions pointed out the need to have expanded outreach and awareness so that more women (and men) from both HQ/field, rural and urban areas, could benefit from the initiative. These perspectives suggest that while WePOWER is already valued, and its potential lies in reaching further and deeper into institutions and communities.

"WePOWER's efforts have contributed to changing norms within organizations by highlighting the importance of gender diversity and showcasing the positive impact of inclusive practices."

Female public utility employee
Bhutan

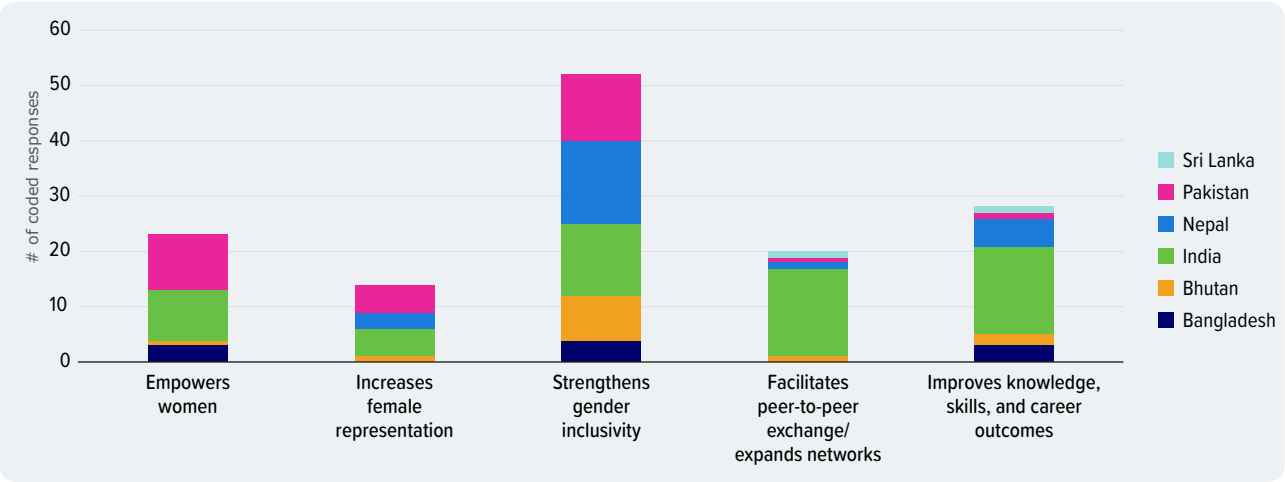


Chart 5: What are WePOWER's Strengths?

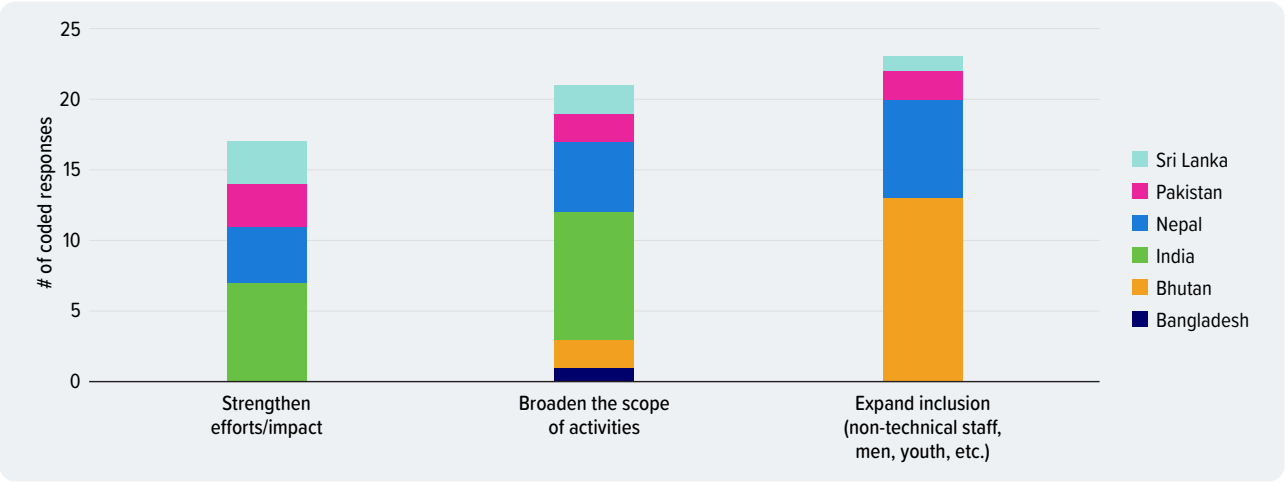


Chart 6: How can WePOWER Improve?

Regional Impact and Cross-Border Inspiration

National and regional partnerships are amplifying WePOWER's impact. The WePOWER Network supports women's participation in power projects and institutions and promotes normative change for women in STEM education. WePOWER Partners have implemented 11,443 gender activities benefiting 207,696 participants, including technical and leadership training, mentorship, internship opportunities, and establishing services and facilities. WePOWER's success has helped to inspire similar 'sister' networks in other regions and sectors such as the Regional Network in Energy for Women in the Middle East and North Africa Region (RENEW MENA), Women in Energy in Latin America and the Caribbean (WENERGY), and Women in Energy Network Africa (WEN Africa).

WePOWER provides a platform for women champions to promote inclusive practices and knowledge sharing, inspiring women at every level. Exposure to inspiring leaders like Sudha Murty and participation in international forums empower women to champion change in their own organizations. "When I saw those young women engineers speak at the Bangkok event, I realized how powerful this platform is," said a participant from India. A participant from Bhutan added, "I attended a WePOWER panel and realized we're not alone. Other countries also struggle, but they are finding ways forward." Another voice from India said, **"WePOWER gave us a platform to showcase our gender inclusion work and learn from others. It raised the bar."**

WePOWER's comprehensive approach is creating visibility and shifting mindsets. "WePOWER has had a substantial impact on enhancing gender diversity and fostering a culture of inclusion in the Power utility through its comprehensive approach," said a Bhutanese public utility employee. "WePOWER helped create visibility for women engineers. Previously, they were not seen as capable professionals. Now, their voices are part of decision-making," added a female public utility employee in Pakistan. "Through WePOWER, we ran leadership and communication training for junior female staff. It really shifted their mindset," said a private utility employee in India.

WePOWER has pushed to achieve visible change in organizational culture and policy. Focal points and champions within the utilities have used WePOWER's tools and results to engage with their senior management and drive clear changes in company policies and encouraging gender sensitivity and diversity. Organizations are establishing quotas, creating dedicated spaces, launching daycare facilities, and revising recruitment practices to include more women. In the words of a respondent from Nepal, "Through WePOWER, Nepal Engineers Association is advocating for 33% women representation in its Central Executive Committee." A male respondent in Pakistan emphasized how "WePOWER has helped get women into grid stations, breaking misconceptions about technical roles." Another male participant, also from Pakistan, added, "We've seen women rise to managerial roles because of WePOWER." There are similar echoes from Bangladesh: "The initiative has helped us change mindsets and adopt practices from other countries through knowledge sharing," said a female utility employee.

WePOWER's training are transforming women's participation and confidence in the power sector across South Asia. The program provides leadership, technical, and communication training, helping women voice their opinions confidently and pursue new opportunities, such as working in solar and renewables. An Indian respondent said, "Because of that training, my technical knowledge has increased. I now voice my opinion confidently." A participant from Nepal said, "The training was extremely useful, focusing on technical challenges while also developing leadership and communication skills." A Sri Lankan participant said, "WePOWER is an important initiative to ensure women in the Power sector can develop their careers. Training, mentoring, and addressing workplace challenges are crucial for its success."

Networking creates lasting support and collaboration. WePOWER connects women engineers throughout the region, fostering peer support and ongoing knowledge sharing. WhatsApp groups and regional programs like SAR100 have led to enduring professional relationships. An Indian SAR100 trainee said, "We are still in a WhatsApp group where we help each other solve technical issues—that is powerful support." Another trainee from Nepal said, "The SAR100 training program connected us with 99 women engineers from across South Asia, inspiring ongoing interaction." A trainee from Pakistan summed it up in the following words: "WePOWER has strengthened our internal resolve by creating a network of support."

"WePOWER helped build momentum for internal change. Our HR team began revising policies after engaging with the network."

Female public utility employee
Sri Lanka

"WePOWER helped us network across institutions. Earlier, women in Energy were scattered – now there's a sense of collective identity."

Female public utility employee
Nepal

Understanding WePOWER's Enabling Drivers and Impact

Based on the findings of the study, we have a clearer understanding of the drivers and impact of WePOWER. We can expect that if WePOWER Partners continue to implement coordinated actions under five pillars—exposing girls to STEM opportunities, structuring inclusive internships and targeted recruitment, strengthening professional development and mentoring, adopting supportive policies and facilities, and deepening networking through national chapters—then more qualified women will enter the pipeline, be hired into technical roles, stay and advance within utilities, and shape leadership. This will increase women's share of employment and leadership in the power sector and entrench gender-inclusive norms and systems that sustain these gains over time. The network's regional convening, toolkits, and evidence-based peer learning accelerate diffusion of what works, and enables continuous adaptation based on data and feedback. This report has captured some of these nuances that show that the WePOWER approach is on the right track.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework for WePOWER

	Pillar A: STEM Outreach & Norms	Pillar B: Recruitment & Internships	Pillar C: Professional Development & Mentoring	Pillar D: Retention & Women-Friendly Facilities	Pillar E: Policies, Networking, & National Chapters	Long Term Outcomes
Activities	School engagements, site visits, role-model talks, communications to address norms.	Gender-targeted outreach, inclusive internships, campus engagement, job fairs, supervisor coaching.	Technical/leadership training, mentoring, representation in projects, entrepreneurship, peer exchange	Women-friendly services; return-to-work support, safer transport; women-friendly facilities (child-care, etc.).	Adoption of anti-harassment, parental leave, flexible work policies; cross-institutional networks, national chapters, working groups	Increased proportion of women employed in the energy sector, particularly in technical and leadership roles, contributing to a more inclusive, productive, and resilient workforce that can meet energy transition needs 13. Systemic changes in sector norms, policies, and talent systems that sustain gender equality in energy over time.
Outputs	STEM outreach events delivered; girls reached.	Internships/apprenticeships established; women interns placed; job fairs conducted.	Trainings conducted; mentee-mentor pairs formed; peer exchange events conducted	Services provided; facilities built/upgraded; return-to-work programs delivered;	Utility policies adopted/improved; national chapters and working groups formed; progress reporting completed.	
Intermediate-Outcomes	Increased awareness and improved attitudes toward women in STEM; larger female applicant pool to energy programs.	Larger qualified female applicant pool; increased internship-to-hire conversion; more women hired in technical roles.	Enhanced staff technical capacities; higher promotion rates to supervisory/management roles.	Improved early-career retention; Reduced attrition; higher re-entry after maternity; increased uptake of field/technical roles by women.	Faster diffusion of good practices; institutionalized gender action plans and KPIs; sustained collaboration.	

	Pillar A: STEM Outreach & Norms	Pillar B: Recruitment & Internships	Pillar C: Professional Development & Mentoring	Pillar D: Retention & Women-Friendly Facilities	Pillar E: Policies, Networking, & National Chapters	Long Term Outcomes
Indicators	# of girls reached; % change in girls' STEM intentions/applications.	# of women interns/ hires; internship-to-hire conversion rate; # of utilities using Internship Module.	# of women trained annually; # of women promoted annually; mentoring participation outcomes.	1- and 3-year retention by sex; # of facilities built/upgraded; utilization rates; workplace climate survey scores.	# of policies adopted; # of active chapters; % of partners with gender action plans; reporting compliance rate.	
Evidence	11,400+ activities reaching 207,000+ women/girls (2019-24); 500+ STEM workshops reaching 43,000+ girls (2019-24).	23,000+ internships (2019-24); 1,700+ hires (2019-24); Internship Module is being applied by partners.	74,000+ women trained (2019-24); formal mentoring programs introduced by partners.	890+ women-friendly facilities/services (2019-24).	60+ partners; national chapters are expanding; working groups have been launched.	
Enablers	Engagement Framework (WePOWER 5 Pillars, Reporting System, Secretariat Function). Feedback Loop: Regional convenings, peer learning, and data/analytics enable continuous improvement and scaling of what works. > Targets for small incremental activities add up – especially at the regional level- encouraging organizations to do more. > Information and inspiration (STEM outreach, role models) reduce stereotypes and increase girls' STEM intentions; more women pursue relevant degrees. > Structured internships and targeted recruitment bridge the school-to-work gap; employers gain experience with women interns and identify hires. > Mentoring, training, and returnship support reduce attrition rates; women's confidence and capability in technical and leadership roles grow. > Workplace policies and facilities lower practical barriers, improving retention – Clear communication of changes and engaging men, particularly male champions, is essential. > Networks and chapters create peer pressure, knowledge exchange, and collective problem-solving, accelerating adoption of effective practices.					

"Before WePOWER's inception, there was a lack of understanding regarding women's issues and requirements. Consequently, WePOWER has initiated efforts to raise awareness in general."

Male Power sector employee
Bangladesh

Recommendations for Greater Impact

WePOWER can improve with further room for growth – demand from power sector clients and stakeholders is clear. The qualitative and quantitative data identify areas for improvement, according to power sector stakeholders. Interconnected priorities include advancing childcare support (through flexible work arrangements, leave options, and facilities/services), improving human resources policies for women—particularly by emphasizing training—and promoting balanced hiring practices with a focus on outreach and exposure to the sector and the visibility of role models. The network is regarded as a mechanism for generating professional opportunities, fostering partnerships, and building skills among women. Stakeholders view them as mutually reinforcing, with collaboration and capacity-building seen as essential components in expanding opportunities for women in the Power sector.

Expanding outreach and strengthening implementation is crucial for WePOWER's continued progress. While broad support exists for the network, many respondents pointed out that its visibility and integration remain limited, especially among non-technical staff in offices outside of the big cities and rural areas. As one respondent emphasized, "Women in rural areas don't know about career opportunities in the Power sector. A respondent from Nepal added, "We need to conduct WePOWER information and sharing sessions for all staff, as currently only a few are aware." Another respondent from Bangladesh added, "We don't know about WePOWER, but it can be a powerful network to promote gender equity." India and Sri Lanka had the highest frequency of respondents who were not aware of WePOWER, signaling the work required by the National Chapters to broaden engagement with women and men in different parts of their country.

Supportive facilities and flexible work arrangements are essential to retain and empower women. The demand for on-site childcare and flexible working hours was repeatedly highlighted, with family responsibilities cited as a significant constraint. These measures not only support women's career continuity but also foster a more inclusive and productive workplace. Statements such as "A good daycare will allow us to focus on work without worrying about our kids," expressed by a female employee at a Pakistan utility, a "Flexible working hours for women with families should be prioritized to retain talent," recognized by a male utility manager in India, echoed across the region.

"On-site daycare is a simple step that can make a big difference for women employees."

Female public utility employee
Sri Lanka

Greater focus on enhancing institutional support and gender-friendly policies is necessary for lasting change. Respondents strongly advocated for the development and implementation of clear gender policies, actionable plans, and annual reviews. A female employee from Nepal, said, "Organizational GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) policy, strategy, and gender action plan is very crucial to create an inclusive and supportive work environment for women," while a male employee from Sri Lanka added that "Policies must not only exist on paper but also be effectively implemented. We need to measure the impact of gender policies on hiring and career growth." Both these voices illustrate the need for policies that move beyond token gestures to create real workplace improvements.

- **Fair and transparent recruitment and promotion practices are fundamental to addressing gender disparities.** Diverse hiring panels, mentorship, and career progression standards are vital to challenging stereotypes and advancing women in the sector. "Diverse hiring panels with female members can help reduce biases in recruitment processes," (Bhutan, female), and "Promotion processes should be gender-neutral and based on qualifications, but we still see biases in leadership selections," (Sri Lanka, female), reflect a consensus across countries for more equitable processes.

- **Continuous training, knowledge sharing, and mentorship are pivotal for empowering women and shifting mindsets.** Conferences, targeted training, and structured mentorship were consistently recommended. "Organizations should prioritize women-specific training and capacity-building activities to foster confidence and leadership skills," (Nepal, male), and "Mentorship programs with experienced women leaders can help younger women navigate career challenges," (Bhutan, female), highlight the value of ongoing professional development and support. Collaboration with universities and partners outside the Energy sector for trainings is also recommended, with another respondent sharing, "If WePOWER could work with universities to provide career coaching for female engineering students, more women might stay in the sector long-term," (Sri Lanka, female)

- **Gender sensitization and joint training for all employees, especially men, are key to fostering workplace harmony.** Training programs that involve both men and women were identified as crucial for bridging gaps and building mutual respect. "Conducting joint training sessions for men and women would bridge gaps and enhance workplace harmony," (Sri Lanka, female), and "We need training programs that focus on overcoming unconscious bias, targeting both men and women," (Bhutan, female), point to the necessity of addressing cultural and unconscious biases throughout organizations. Clearly articulating the 'why' and 'how' of organizational changes—while establishing objective feedback loops—is essential to reducing potential friction and pushback from male staff while addressing systemic imbalances to equity. It is not inherently obvious to all that female oriented initiatives are correcting imbalances in organizational systems. Clear communication must establish that link.

- **Improved workplace safety, infrastructure, and transport services are necessary to support women in technical and field roles.** "Safe transport options should be provided for women traveling to remote sites," (Bhutan, female), and "Field stations need safe and secure accommodations for women to work effectively," (Pakistan, female). More transparent grievance mechanisms are also needed. "Improved grievance mechanisms would encourage women to speak up about workplace issues," (Bangladesh, female), and "There needs to be a clear policy on sexual harassment, and it should be implemented properly, not just on paper," (Sri Lanka, female).

Addressing persistent gender norms remains crucial. Women noted that, despite supportive policies and facilities, equality and career opportunities are not always perceived or achieved due to ongoing barriers rooted in workplace norms and unconscious bias. Existing policies and training often fall short, highlighting the need for coordinated behavior change and clearer communication. Sustainable culture shifts and increased awareness can strengthen gender initiatives and workplace outcomes. As men hold most technical and leadership positions, their involvement is essential. "Gender sensitization workshops should be mandatory for all staff to challenge stereotypes and biases," agreed a male utility employee from Sri Lanka. "There is a strong need for sensitization of all employees, male and female, at all levels, to emphasize gender equality, raise awareness, and promote gender mainstreaming. Such programs can help address subtle biases and stereotypes that persist," recommended a female utility employee from Bhutan.

Conclusion

As the saying goes, "what doesn't get measured doesn't get done." WePOWER Partners have taken this adage to heart.

WePOWER's engagement framework, incremental target setting approach, and multi-faceted interventions have catalyzed measurable improvements in gender diversity, inclusion, and empowerment in South Asia's Energy sector. Small incremental activities can make an impact— and WePOWER is making a difference—driving gender equality, building networks, and inspiring women across South Asia. Progress is evident in recruitment, policy, training, and visibility, but persistent gender norms and safety concerns remain, with childcare (and women's expected role) being key barriers in all countries. The findings emphasize the need for continued commitment, tailored interventions, and inclusive leadership to sustain and accelerate change. Expanding outreach and engagement with men will be key to realizing WePOWER's full potential. The evidence demonstrates both quantitative gains and qualitative shifts in attitudes, offering a roadmap for further action.

The need to establish the permanent WePOWER Regional Secretariat and establish the National Chapters is clear. The demand for WePOWER to do more and the key actions for improvements have been identified. The Regional Secretariat and National Chapters, led by the Partners, will be best placed to achieve these goals of scaling up impact while also improving engagement within each country. Regional collaboration and knowledge sharing will continue to be the bedrock for WePOWER. By implementing these recommendations—informed by diverse voices from across South Asia's Power sector— WePOWER can continue to drive measurable progress toward gender equity and empowerment, ensuring that policies and practices foster a workplace culture where all can contribute and succeed.

"I feel that women can do any work. I feel that a person cannot measure or limit the ability of woman by specifying the type of jobs a woman can do."

Female public utility employee
Bhutan

ANNEX

1. Private vs Public Utilities: Gender Dynamics in Promotion, Pay, and Work Culture

This section examines key differences between private and public utilities regarding gender dynamics, promotion opportunities, pay equity, and workplace culture. Drawing on anonymous quantitative from the SAR power sector employee survey, the findings highlight that while private utilities may provide more opportunities for career advancement, they also present a higher risk of perceived discrimination and unequal treatment in promotions and evaluations. In total, 2,355 respondents, of which 652 (27.7%) women filled the employee survey which is higher than anticipated and representative of the SAR power sector- with 993 from public utilities and 683 from private utilities.

Perception of Supportive Work Environment

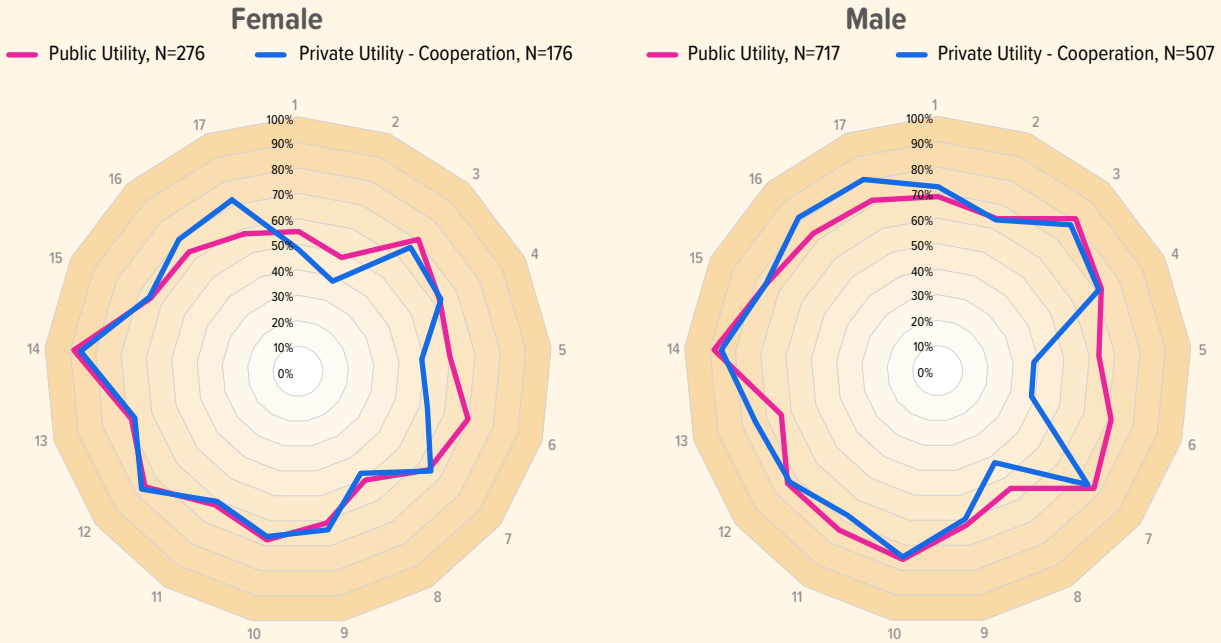
Overall, public sector utilities employees report a comparable work environment to their employees in private utilities and women have consistently lower rating than their male counterparts. The primary gap between public and private utilities appears to involve unequal pay and compensation, affecting both male and female employees.

- **Promotion opportunities and discrimination:** The gap in perceptions of fair promotion and career growth is relatively modest. Overall, 54% of employees in public utilities report fair and equal promotion opportunities, compared with 44% in private utilities. This suggests that public utilities are viewed somewhat more positively on advancement, but concerns about promotion fairness remain present in both sectors. At the same time, gender differences across the broader workplace data indicate that barriers to advancement are not only sector-specific but also linked to women's less favorable workplace experiences overall.

- **Work culture and hours:** Perceptions of work culture are mixed, but broadly similar across sectors on several day-to-day measures. Overall, 89% of employees in public utilities and 86% in private utilities report feeling safe at the workplace after office hours, while about 73% in both sectors are satisfied with fieldwork assignments. Likewise, 74% in public utilities and 73% in private utilities feel that their opinions and suggestions count at work. Private utilities show a slight advantage on practical support measures, with 61% reporting support for work–life balance compared with 62% in public utilities, and a more notable lead on accommodation of care responsibilities, at 79% versus 68%.

- **Representation, pay, and retention:** The strongest sector gap appears in pay-related perceptions, with public utilities rating much more positively than private utilities on salary fairness. Overall, 63% of employees in public utilities say their salary matches their experience and position, compared with 41% in private utilities. Similarly, 71% in public utilities say their salary aligns with colleagues in similar roles, compared with 43% in private utilities. Job satisfaction is also somewhat higher in public utilities, at 71% versus 66%. Together, these results suggest that while public utilities appear stronger on perceived pay equity, broader workplace conditions still matter for retention and long-term representation.

Employee Perceptions by Private vs Public



1. Receives adequate personal deve
2. Receives adequate professional/technical traininglopment training
3. Opinions and ideas considered by colleagues
4. Opinions and ideas considered by managers
5. Salary matches experience and position
6. Salary aligns with colleagues in similar roles
7. Receives proper guidelines and advice for tasks
8. Has fair and equal promotion and career growth opportunities
9. Organization supports work–life balance
10. Opinions and suggestions count at work
11. Satisfied with job
12. Maternity leave days are sufficient
13. Paternity leave is in line with government policy
14. Feels safe at workplace after office hours
15. Satisfied with fieldwork assignments
16. Organization accommodates needs of persons with disabilities
17. Organization accommodates employees' care responsibilities

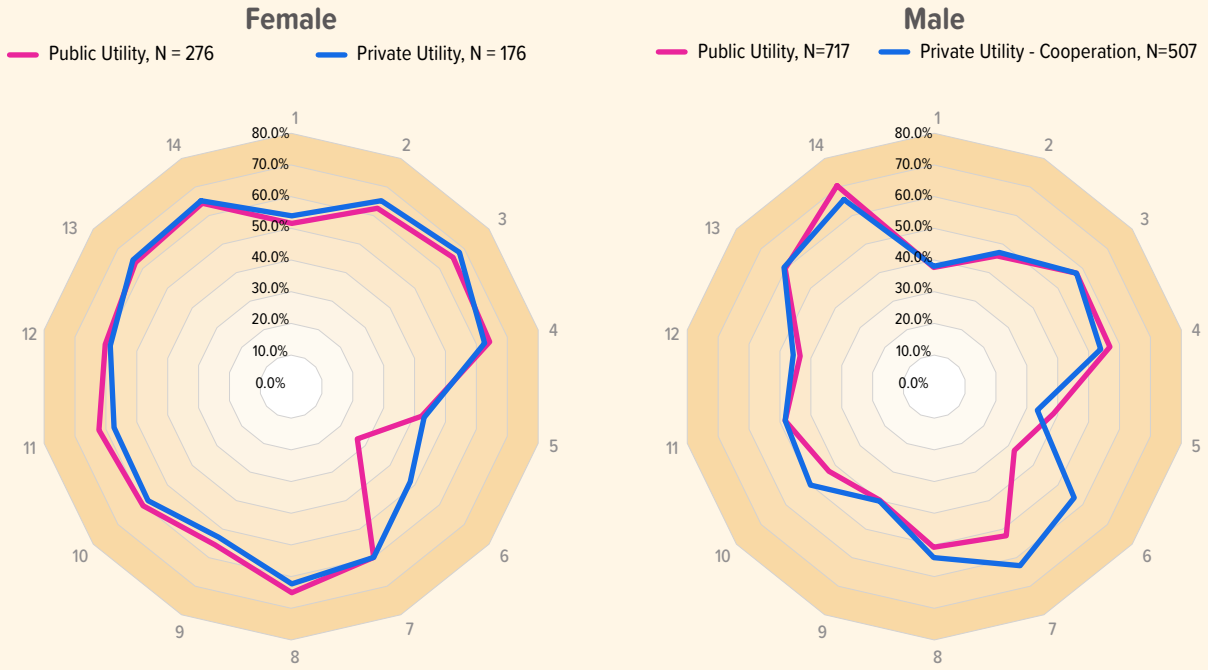
Perception of Discrimination at Work

A deeper examination of perception of discrimination at the workplace provides further insight for the previous observations. In both public and private utilities, men report notably fewer instances of bias and discrimination—as seen by their noticeably smaller radar representation—which suggests men typically have a more positive work environment than women. Reinforcing the previous analysis on perception of support, the primary gap is unequal pay and compensation, affecting both male and female employees. For both women and men, differences between public and private utilities are relatively modest across several other indicators, including lack of acknowledgment, being assigned tasks below rank, and ideas not taken seriously, suggesting that these challenges are present across both sectors.

- **For women, the clearest public–private gap appears in unequal pay or compensation,** which is reported more frequently in private utilities than in public utilities. Women in private utilities also report somewhat higher levels of harassment or inappropriate behavior. By contrast, women in public utilities report slightly higher levels of microaggressions, exclusion from networking and professional development, and distrust in work quality by supervisors.

- **For men, the most visible public–private gaps also relate to unequal pay or compensation and unequal treatment in promotions and evaluations,** both of which appear higher in private utilities. Men are more likely to report that women receive special or better treatment, indicating that perceptions of reverse favoritism, which seems are stronger in the public sector. This aligns with the findings in the qualitative survey, where men believe that women receive preferential treatment through the various benefits such as flex leave/flex-work policies and accessories training opportunities such as SAR100 through WePOWER.

Public vs Private Employee Discrimination Perception Radar



1. Excluded from team meetings
2. Lack of acknowledgment
3. Assigned tasks below rank
4. Ideas not taken seriously
5. Harassment or inappropriate behavior
6. Unequal pay or compensation
7. Unequal treatment in promotions/evaluations
8. Unequal access to projects/networking
9. Distrust in work quality by supervisors
10. Excluded from networking/professional development
11. Microaggressions
12. Stereotyping based on gender
13. Unequal workload distribution
14. Women given special/better

Examining discrimination perceptions clarifies why workplace views differ by revealing their underlying causes. Women's lower ratings on training, support, recognition, career growth, and overall workplace satisfaction are consistent with their higher reported experiences of exclusion, stereotyping, lack of acknowledgment, and unequal treatment. In contrast, men's generally more positive workplace perceptions align with their lower reported levels of discrimination across most dimensions. This relationship is strongest for indicators related to career development, inclusion, and workplace support, though it is less pronounced in areas such as salary, leave policies, and safety, where perceptions are more similar across genders. The findings suggest that these areas are more standardized through formal policies or institutional rules, making employees' experiences somewhat more uniform regardless of gender, even if broader differences in workplace culture and advancement opportunities persist.

- **Promotion Opportunities and Discrimination:** Private utilities offer more promotion opportunities but also a higher risk of discrimination in promotions and assessments. Unequal treatment in promotions and evaluations is reported by 54.2% of respondents in public utilities and 61.9% in private utilities In general, the survey reports of gender bias in promotion are higher in private utilities (29%) than in public (23%) with employees in private utilities rate promotion fairness lower than those in public utilities.[3] Public utilities base promotions on years worked, reducing biases related to performance assessments.

- **Work Culture and Hours:** Private sector employees reported longer hours and after-hours availability from employees, reflected in a slightly higher share of staff working 4+ hours from home (Private 37% vs Public 36%). Public utilities generally offer stable hours, though this varies, with a large majority of employees in both sectors working 8+ hours in the office (public 86% vs Private 84%). Jobs in Distribution sector for women are primarily office-based in billing and customer service. Transmission and Generation sector jobs involve uncertain hours and frequent fieldwork, particularly impacting women.

- **Representation, Pay, and Retention:** Survey data show fairly equal representation of women respondents who account for 28% of public utility employees and 26% in private utilities. Unequal pay is cited by 54.3% in private utilities, compared to 31.0% in public utilities. Women in private utilities are more likely to be early-career (55% under 5 years vs 25% in public) and less represented in long-tenure roles (24% over 10 years vs 51% in public). Among men, longer retention is more common in public utilities, with 34% having 15+ years of experience compared to 22% in private.

3 Employees in private utilities rate promotion fairness lower (mean 2.86 ± 1.28) than those in public utilities (mean 3.12 ± 1.31) in a 5-point Likert Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree ... 5=Strongly Agree.

2. SAR100 – Regional Training for Women Engineers

For many women in SAR Power sector, WePOWER's SAR100 program was a career-defining opportunity. Participants described it as a rigorous but rewarding experience that combined technical training with leadership development. One junior female engineer from India admitted that she, iinitially hesitant and unsure of her place among international peers, described the training as "life-changing". Through exposure to global best practices, technical modules, and conversations with senior women leaders, she discovered both her potential and passion for leadership. "Now," she said, "my dream is to be the head of my plant. I used to just follow orders. Now, I question, I suggest, and I lead." Another female engineer from Nepal shared that "the SAR100 program was a game-changer. It connected us with peers across South Asia, built our skills, and inspired us to pursue higher goals." This initiative exemplifies how targeted programs can transform individual careers and foster a sense of community among women professionals in the region. SAR100 shows how WePOWER initiatives can radically shift individual confidence and ambition—an impact that cascades well beyond the duration of the program. Indeed, the women still stay in touch through the WhatsApp groups and regularly have in-person get-togethers.

A follow-up survey of 126 SAR100 graduates showed that **84% of the women experienced increased visibility and recognition at work,** while **46% received promotions or took on assumed new leadership responsibilities.** Additionally, **76% have become active mentors to 194 women,** further expanding the program's positive influence.

3. WePOWER Working Groups – Collaborating to solve common challenges

WePOWER Regional Working Groups (RWGs) serve as collaborative platforms to address common challenges and advance the network's key objectives of increasing women's participation in the energy sector. Convened by the WePOWER Interim-Secretariat, the RWGs bring together WePOWER Partners, international experts, and energy sector stakeholders to exchange best practices, design capacity-building programs, and promote policy innovations. Since 2019, the RWGs have delivered tangible outputs and launched impactful initiatives that have strengthened WePOWER's mission and reinforced its regional mandate.

The 10-member regional **WePOWER Internship Working Group** collaborated to develop the WPOWER Internship Module, a comprehensive toolkit that includes templates, checklists, and guidance for both employers and interns. This resource presents a structured framework comprising eight steps and 23 attributes designed to provide more meaningful learning experiences for both women and men interns. Partners such as LESCO in Pakistan have utilized the module to establish a two-month paid internship program offering a stipend of Rs. 30,000. Globally, Equal Aqua used the module worldwide to guide gender diagnostics in Mozambique and help river basin organizations start internships for gender diversity.

The **Large Systems Training Program Working Group,** composed of 12 members, helped train and graduate over 200 women engineers through the first two cohorts of the eight-month hybrid SAR100 Technical Training Program. Delivered by the Yunus Center at the Asian Institute of Technology (YCA) with funding from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the program launched in June 2023 with 101 graduates in March 2024, followed by 108 graduates from the second cohort in June 2025.

The **HRM Best Practices Regional Working Group,** composed of 17 members, published the WePOWER HR Metrics Framework, a tool to standardize DEI metrics across energy organizations. The RWG supported a behavior change pilot with K-Electric (Pakistan) to enhance women's recruitment in distribution operations. To foster knowledge sharing, the RWG organized three HR Expert Coffee Series sessions and a learning session on "Bridging the Gender Gaps: Connecting HR Metrics and Operational Data."

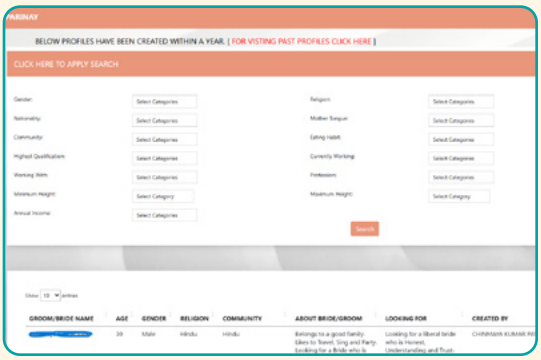
The 10-member **Returning Parents Working Group** published the WePOWER Returning and Working Mothers (Parents) Module, highlighting 10 key policies adopted by WePOWER Partners to support parents returning to work. The RWG also actively supports the annual Returning Mothers Conference each November and, in 2024, launched International Returning Mothers Day. Celebrated every September 10 as a joint initiative of WePOWER and IEEE's Returning Mothers Conference, the first ever event was inaugurated at the World Bank headquarters in New Delhi under the theme "Every comeback is a powerful beginning." The event brought together over 70 participants, featuring keynote messages by high-level dignitaries from international development organizations, panel discussions, and a fireside chat with senior leaders from WePOWER Partner institutions.

4. Bhutan's Marchang Ceremony — Inspiring Change at BPC

On July 1, 2024, Bhutan Power Corporation (BPC) took an important step towards greater inclusivity. During the company's 22nd Foundation Day, a senior female engineer performed the Marchang—a ceremony that serves as a gesture of respect and gratitude to the deities, acknowledging their role in shaping outcomes. Traditionally, this sacred act is exclusively led by a monk or a senior male official who is in a leadership position in the organization. Opening this role for women showed that leadership roles should be based on ability, not tradition. Employees across BPC saw this as a genuine move towards equality. For women in engineering and technical fields, the event sent a clear message that their leadership is respected. With this action, BPC set a positive example for making workplaces in Bhutan's corporate and STEM sectors more inclusive.

Photo 1: Senior engineer performs Marchang ceremony on BPC's 22nd Foundation Day. 1 July 2024

5. India: Love as a Talent Retention Strategy at NTPC Limited



Power sector STEM jobs often require employees to be posted across India, including remote areas, offering valuable professional experience but also posing retention challenges—particularly for women. These roles provide opportunities for skill development and career advancement, yet the distance from family and limited local opportunities for spouses can discourage employees from staying on, especially women whose partners may not find work in these locations.

Recognizing these challenges, NTPC Limited (NTPC) introduced the 'Parinay' portal, an internal matrimonial network designed to facilitate alliances within the organization and support couple postings. Launched in 2012, the portal allows employees and their families to register profiles and access monthly updates about prospective matches within NTPC's extensive community. By 2023, it had facilitated over 1,000 successful alliances, helping employees balance work and family life while maintaining career progression, regardless of gender, and fostering a supportive and understanding workplace culture.

6. Evolving Legal Frameworks—Women and Night Shift Employment in South Asia

Historically, women in South Asia's power and technical sectors faced legal restrictions on night shift employment, reflecting concerns for safety and exploitation. In India, the Factories Act of 1948 prohibited women from working night shifts. However, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020) repealed these restrictions, now allowing women to work in all types of establishments and shifts—including before 6 AM and after 7 PM—with their consent and subject to safety and welfare provisions mandated by the government. If work is deemed hazardous, employers must provide adequate safeguards prior to employment.

Pakistan also had similar historical barriers, but amendments to the Sindh Shops and Commercial Establishment Act lifted restrictions on women's night work in 2021. In Sri Lanka, recent legislative changes have expanded opportunities for women to work night shifts—particularly in the hospitality and IT/BPO sectors—though limitations remain in other industries. Across these countries, "night shifts" are defined as work between 7 PM and 6 AM.

These legal reforms represent significant steps towards equal opportunities for women. Nonetheless, longstanding perceptions of risk and safety continue to shape workplace practices, especially where operations may be hazardous. Ongoing vigilance and robust safeguards are essential to ensure that legal advancements translate into truly inclusive and safe employment environments for women throughout the region.

> "We can't be posted at night because only three states allow that. So immediately, we're seen as less flexible."
>
> KII, Female
> *Public Utility*

7. Beacons of Inspiration: Women Electricians in Pakistan

WePOWER Partners are using lessons learned from other countries to help women in the sector break barriers in a traditionally male-dominated sector—demonstrating how innovative thinking and the courage to challenge norms can spark lasting change.

The Roshni Baji programme, launched by K-Electric, stands as Pakistan's first female certified electrician training initiative. The training allows them to successfully deploy complete internal wiring on a single-phase supply of up to 5kW from the electric utility's meters to the distribution board of a home. They women are also trained to calculate the load and energy consumption of appliances, which can be used to ensure that the electricity supply inside homes is safe and reliable, and create awareness on energy conservation practices as well. They also have easier access to underserved communities where women predominantly occupy homes during working hours; almost 50 percent of KE's daytime users are women. By empowering women as neighborhood safety ambassadors, it has transformed community engagement advanced electrical safety in vulnerable areas, promoted energy conservation and legal electricity connections.

8. WAPDA's Support for Women: Childcare Initiatives and Workforce Impact

The Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) established in-house childcare facilities and lactation rooms in 2015 and 2018, which enabled working mothers to balance career and family responsibilities, a critical step in a country where cultural expectations often force women to leave their jobs after marriage or childbirth. These facilities, coupled with safe transportation services for mothers and children, empower women to continue their professional journeys with greater security and convenience. The impact of these efforts is clear: WAPDA has doubled the proportion of women in higher officer roles from 8.12 percent in 2010 to 15.78 percent in 2023, while maintaining exceptionally high retention rates—with only minimal resignations, mostly for personal or educational reasons. The availability of childcare and supportive policies has led to a 100 percent return rate for women after maternity leave. WAPDA is using the lessons learned from WePOWER returning mothers module to improve their existing facilities and expand the offerings to other offices and work sites throughout Pakistan.

Acknowledgements

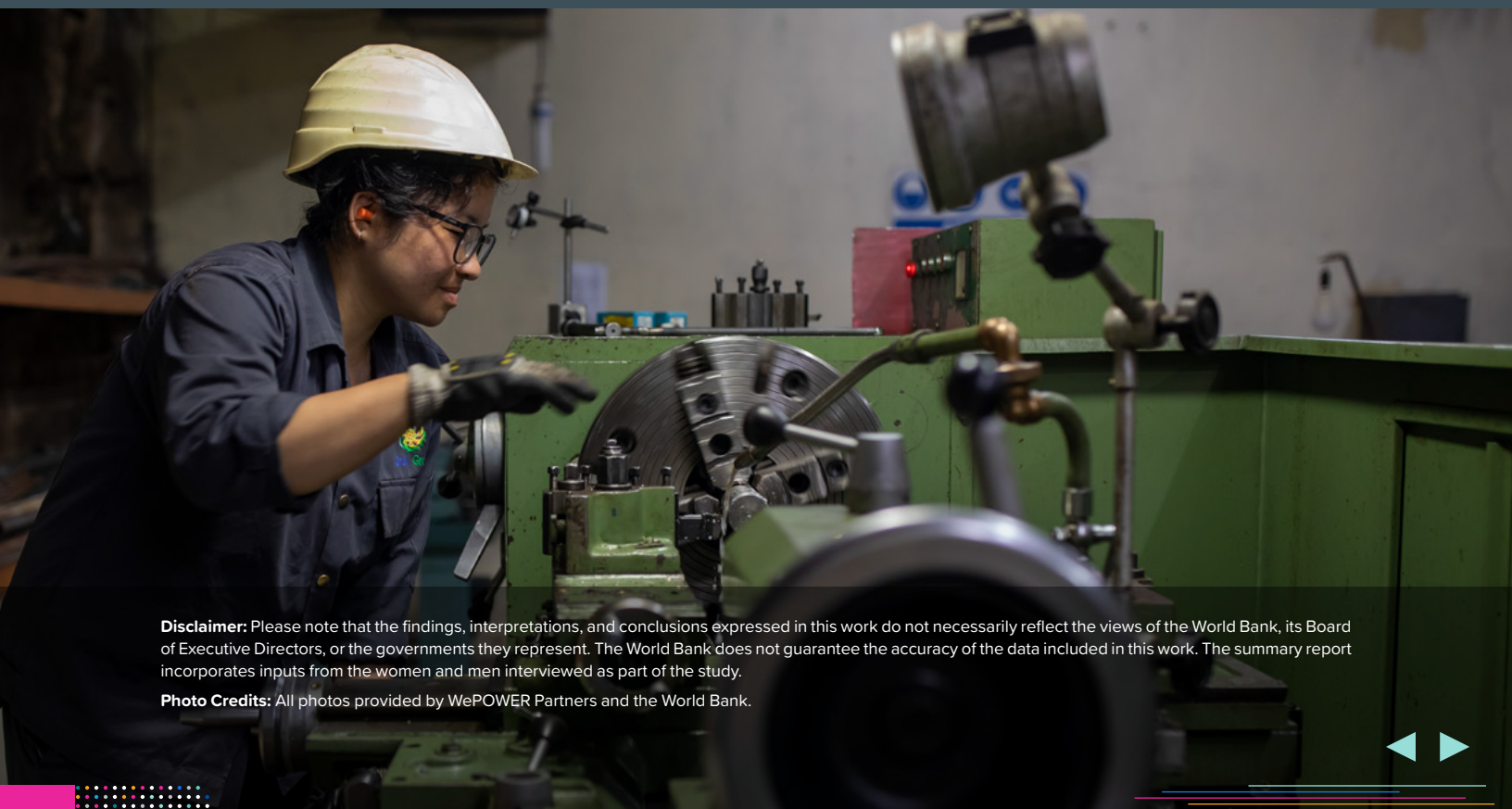
This study was conducted for the South Asia Women in Power Sector Professional Network (WePOWER) by the World Bank's South Asia Gender and Energy Facility (SAGE), drawing on extensive primary data collection across South Asia. The team is grateful for the contributions of WePOWER Partners, who facilitated data collection, interviews, and focus group discussions. The authors also thank all survey respondents and interview participants who generously shared their time and perspectives.

The team sincerely thanks the Gender and Energy Experts Working Group— Ainoon Naher (Bangladesh), Manju Giri (Bhutan), Renuka Gurung (Nepal), Ruchi Khurana (India), Fatimah Ihsan (Pakistan), Laila Ashraf (Pakistan), and Thelge Kala Oshadhi Peiris De Costa (Sri Lanka)—for leading extensive fieldwork in their respective countries and contributing to the methodology, survey instruments, transcriptions, and analytical framework.

The report was prepared by Pranav Vaidya (Social Development Specialist), Gai Hatzfeldt (Qualitative Data Consultant), Fatima Karout (Quantitative Data Consultant), and Afsana Afshar (Energy Operations Consultant), with exceptional support from the core WePOWER team from the World Bank, including Tanushree Bhowmik (India Coordinator), Faisal Alih (Partnerships Coordinator), Anita Thapa (Nepal Coordinator), Faizul Karim (Bangladesh Coordinator), Aditi Sengupta (Editor), Abdullah Yadgare (Communications), Perla Del Carmen Espiel (Program Assistant), and Alejandro Espinosa (Graphics Designer).

The team benefited from the guidance and technical expertise of World Bank experts Gunjan Gautam (Senior Energy Specialist), Tanuja Batarjajee (Senior Energy Specialist), Maria Beatriz Orlando (Senior Social Development Specialist), and Vanessa Lopes Janik (Gender and Energy Consultant), whose strategic direction and support strengthened the rigor and quality of the analysis. The team would like to thank Samantha M. Constant (Senior Gender Specialist), Surbhi Goyal (Senior Energy Specialist), and Minahil Raza (Energy Specialist) for their valuable inputs as peer reviewers.

Finally, the team is grateful for ESMAP's financial and strategic support, which made this assessment possible. The authors also sincerely appreciate the leadership, guidance, and continued commitment of World Bank management to advancing gender equality in the energy sector. Their support was instrumental in ensuring the quality, rigor, and impact of this work.



Disclaimer: Please note that the findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent. The World Bank does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. The summary report incorporates inputs from the women and men interviewed as part of the study.

Photo Credits: All photos provided by WePOWER Partners and the World Bank.

About WePOWER

The South Asia Women in Power Sector Professional Network (WePOWER) is a coalition of over 60 Energy sector stakeholders, including utilities, universities, and professional associations. WePOWER was collectively launched by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and Energy and Education sector stakeholders in February 2019. It is a scalable, regional approach to increasing workforce participation of women in technical and leadership roles in Energy-sector organizations to help accelerate the energy transition in South Asia. WePOWER's objectives are to increase workforce participation of women in energy projects and utilities, and promote normative change for women and girls in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education. WePOWER Partners implement gender activities under five pillars (i) STEM Education; (ii) Recruitment; (iii) Professional Development; (iv) Retention; and (v) Policy and Institutional Change. WePOWER is supported by the South Asia Gender and Energy Facility (SAGE) at the World Bank, which serves as the Interim-Secretariat, and the generous funding from the Government of Australia's South Asia Regional Trade Facilitation Program (SARTFP) and the World Bank's Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP).

Learn More:

www.wepowernetwork.org

WePOWER

ESMAP
Energy Sector Management Assistance Program

WORLD BANK GROUP
Energy & Extractives