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Catalyzing Global Women's Leadership

in the **Green** and **Blue Economies**

COUNTERPART
INTERNATIONAL



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About Counterpart International

Counterpart International partners with local organizations around the world to build inclusive, sustainable communities in which people thrive. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, it forges community-based partnerships between citizens, government, civil society, and the private sector in the areas of food security, democracy, rights and governance, women's empowerment, and climate resiliency to build the capacity of communities to shape their own destinies. Since 1965, Counterpart has operated in more than 65 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Overview

To celebrate International Women’s Day 2024, Counterpart International—together with EnCompass LLC, Chemonics International, and the Saudat Salami Foundation—organized a hybrid half-day event on March 5, 2024, consisting of two panels and a roundtable discussion. The goal was to better understand the challenges that diverse groups of women around the world face in accessing and leading in the green and blue economies, and to hear their priorities for advancing a more women-inclusive and sustainable sector that could contribute to global economic growth and food security. The panels featured the perspectives of experts from Counterpart’s Global Women in Management (GWIM) program, USAID’s Climate Gender Equity Fund (CGEF) and Engendering Industries programs, the U.S. State Department’s Office of Global Women’s Issues, INGOs, academia, and the private sector for a solutions-focused dialogue. The following reflects many of the themes that surfaced during the event, as well as additional desk research, on the realities of and potential solutions for emerging women leaders in the growing green and blue economies.

Defining the Green and Blue Economies

Green Economy: sustainable environmental practices across economic sectors such as farming and forestry, with a focus on reducing pollution, carbon emissions, and land degradation. This includes investing in renewable solar and wind energy and implementing sustainable agricultural practices.

Blue Economy: advancing the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, while protecting access, health, and livelihoods. This includes sustainable fisheries management, clean water management, and marine renewable energy projects.

Trends on Women in the Green and Blue Economies

For over a decade, evidence has confirmed that supporting women's economic participation is good for the world. In 2012 the World Bank showed how increasing women's capacity to launch businesses or access jobs has strong global poverty reduction benefits.¹ A 2015 McKinsey report showed that advancing gender equality could add \$12 trillion to global GDP.² More recent International Monetary Fund research shows that fully eliminating gender gaps in emerging economies could add 23% to GDP in those countries.³ The world is now also seeing global economic, social, and environmental benefits from women's participation alongside men in the rapidly developing green and blue economies. Women currently make up half of the workforce of fishery and aquaculture value chains around the world and are helping to revolutionize the industry, such as with the [Indonesia Tuna Consortium](#). Women-led companies like [EcoWave Power](#) in Israel are creating new blue energy tech solutions with promising returns. Women-led social enterprises like [C. Green Organic Future Foods](#) of northern India are combining traditional and modern techniques to conserve soil, promote healthy eating, and return profits to their community. And the STEM ecosystem company [WomHub](#) in South Africa is creating incubator and accelerator programs for women-founded STEM companies, most of which are involved in the sustainable economy.

Demand for talent with expertise in the blue and green economies is high, with job postings growing 8% per year.⁴ Green and blue economic investments are rapidly increasing around the world. For example, venture capital funding in climate tech companies is growing significantly faster than overall rates.⁵ BloombergNEF reported that there was a record \$755 billion in venture capital investments in energy-transition technologies in 2021, representing a 27% increase from the year before.⁶ Forbes affirms that there are increasing venture capital investments in ocean sustainable companies, including marine renewable energy and responsible fishing and aquaculture production.⁷ Yet, all investments are not created equal. Less than 22% of the over \$630 billion in climate investments in 2019 and 2020 were gender sensitive.⁸

¹ World Bank Group, 2012. [Women, Business, and the Law Report 2012](#).

² McKinsey Global Institute, 2015. [The Power of Parity: How advancing women's equality can add \\$12 trillion to global growth](#).

³ International Monetary Fund, 2024. [Interim Guidance Note on Mainstreaming Gender at the IMF](#).

⁴ LinkedIn, 2022. [Global Green Skills Report 2022](#).

⁵ Venture Blog, Mike Butcher, 2020. [New report finds VC investment into climate tech growing five times faster than overall VC](#).

⁶ Capital Monitor Blog, Virginia Furness, 2021. [Clean tech: Are females excluded from the green economy?](#)

⁷ Forbes Blog, Anthony Roth, 2024. [Investing in a blue economy](#).

⁸ Climate Policy Initiative, 2021. [Global Landscape of Climate Finance](#).

In 2021, global private equity investments in men-founded clean tech companies were valued at \$10 billion, compared to only \$26.1 million in those founded by women.⁹ Over the last five years, only 5.7% of start-ups in Asia have been women-founded¹⁰ and 1.5% or \$209 million of start-up funds in Africa went to women-led companies. Even less went to women-led sustainability businesses.¹¹ The difference is staggering and the lesson is clear: green and blue tech companies are growing, and women are not yet a part of the club.

Women face similar problems of exclusion in green and blue sector employment, where they are often blocked from recruitment as well as the crucial trainings, promotions, and the decision-making power they need to lead.¹² Women hold only 29% of the 80 million jobs in the green economy globally, with even fewer in leadership positions.¹³ Women remain underrepresented in industries ranging from energy to fisheries to forestry.

Shifting the Landscape for Women Leaders

New studies have shown the linkage between worsening climate conditions and increased rates of food insecurity for women and girls, as well as increased rates of unemployment, land grabs, displacement, school dropouts, early and forced marriage, sex trafficking, forced prostitution, and additional forms of gender-based violence.¹⁴ Women and girls—especially those who are younger, older, indigenous, or living with disabilities—carry the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation and have even greater incentives to help drive economic solutions.

Sometimes referred to as the “mother of Nigerian e-commerce”, **Saudat Salami** saw that despite women’s green and blue career advancement, domestic duties often forced women to prioritize home and care responsibilities over their careers. As a technology professional, Saudat created online platforms to help women better address this gap.

“It’s not just about getting women into the workplace. We need to make sure the workplace environment is inclusive and that women have the support they need.”

Saudat Salami
CEO and Founder
S. Salami Foundation
Nigeria



⁹ Capital Monitor Blog, Virginia Furness, 2021. [Clean tech: Are females excluded from the green economy?](#)

¹⁰ Google in Asia Blog, Agnieszka Hryniewicz-Bieniek, 2023. [A new fund for women creating AI startups in Asia Pacific.](#)

And OECD Blog, Victoria Masterson, 2024. [Gender Inequality: Women founders and venture capital – some 2023 snapshots](#)

¹¹ Techcabal, 2024. [Breaking Barriers: Female Pioneers in African Tech.](#)

¹² March 5 International Women’s Day Event Presentations, 2024. [Catalyzing Global Women’s Leadership in the Green and Blue Economies. Event Recording.](#)

¹³ OECD. [Job Creation and Local Economic Development 2023: Bridging the Great Green Divide.](#)


¹⁴ UNDP. [Why climate change fuels violence against women](#), 2020 and OHCHR. [Climate change exacerbates violence against women and girls](#), 2022.

There is a global movement to support government initiatives and public-private sector partnerships that are funding timely and necessary initiatives within the blue and green economies. At the COP 27 conference in Cairo, world governments committed nearly \$800 million to support environmental sustainability. This included a new \$150 million from the Biden administration for the [President’s Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience](#) (PREPARE) across Africa. In November 2023, the Biden administration also announced the [Women in the Sustainable Economy](#) (WISE) initiative to bolster women’s economic security, which has now leveraged \$1.2 billion in US and global commitments.

Thilma Komaling works in the tuna industry, fighting for ocean protection in Indonesia, the largest spawning ground for tuna on the planet. She has been challenged at every step of her leadership journey, her skills and expertise constantly doubted.

“It is essential to focus on the larger mission rather than personal doubts or limitations, recognizing the broader impact of one’s actions on future generations.”

Thilma Komaling
Strategic Lead
Indonesia Tuna Consortium



Evidence points to significant economic and environmental gains when women are in leadership roles. The World Bank contends that companies with more gender diverse leadership do better on risk management, innovation, problem-solving, and financial performance; and that those with improvements on women’s share of board memberships are more likely to reduce energy consumption, GHG emissions, and water use.¹⁵

The US government has taken a stand beside the governments of Mexico, Norway, Japan, Ireland, Canada, and Australia to prioritize women in the green and blue economies. These investments also help each government to address

additional urgent priorities. It supports increased global security and economic growth through a reduction in poverty, food insecurity, and mass migration. It simultaneously helps counter the threat of extremist recruitment of vulnerable groups. When diverse women can help innovate solutions that increase cost-efficient clean energy access, improve sustainable agricultural value chains, and protect ocean health and fish supplies, this in turn benefits the entire world.¹⁶

¹⁵ World Bank Blogs, Franziska Deininger and Ana Gren, 2022. [Green jobs for women can combat the climate crisis and boost equality.](#)
¹⁶ March 5 International Women’s Day Event Presentations, 2024. [Catalyzing Global Women’s Leadership in the Green and Blue Economies. Event Recording.](#)

Global policies and funding commitments can only succeed if they support diverse women with the expertise and experience to create and advance viable solutions to rising food, clean water, energy, and pollution demands. This must include not only formal women’s businesses and organizations, but women working in the informal economy. The [Self-Employed Women’s Association](#) of India, with its almost 3 million members, models this by organizing informal women workers in several sustainability sectors, such as recycling. They help train and organize women as waste pickers to sort out valuable recyclables for processing centers, ensuring that informal workers have decent work, fair wages, and a collective voice in the informal side of green business. In addition to honoring informal workers, many of whom have had limited access to schooling or vocational training opportunities, it is also crucial to support skills building. This includes both the public and private sectors investing in STEM education and training for girls and young women side by side with boys and men, to ensure that the next generation of green and blue economic experts is gender balanced.



Challenges and Opportunities

The March 5 forum participants emphasized solutions to advancing women's overall leadership throughout green and blue economy investments, including integrating social behavior change strategies into sustainable economy initiatives. Suggestions included working with whole community systems to make women's economic security activities appeal to men. It means inviting men to the table as household and community co-leaders, and creating platforms in which they can share and validate stories of how women's empowerment in the green and blue economies has positive impact for men, families, and entire community systems.

Other themes included climate financing and increased care options as crucial to help elevate women's economic and leadership potential in emerging green and blue businesses. When women have access to these types of resources, they can flourish, help grow national GDPs, and better provide for their families and communities. Additional challenges and opportunities that event participants identified include:

- Women are often mocked and discriminated against when trying to enter green and blue jobs that are male dominated, such as a forest ranger or fishery manager, often discouraging other women from attempting the same career advancement.
- Gender-based violence is pervasive throughout the green and blue economies.
- Women have many opportunities to innovate within the eco-tourism sector, such as sourcing from women-owned businesses across food, artisanal, and hospitality industries. One example is [V-Resorts](#) in India, which supports ecotourism and sustainability in 20 states and partners with local women's cooperatives to supply all natural food products to guests. Yet, women in ecotourism also have fewer job opportunities, lower pay, and increased informal work resulting in limited job security and benefits without sufficient investment.
- Engendering Industries¹⁷ and CGEF¹⁸ have evidence that leadership development activities, equitable HR policies, women-friendly infrastructure, and access to flexible finance are essential for women to thrive in male-dominated industries.
- Women only make up 25% of the growing renewable energy sector.¹⁹

¹⁷ USAID. [The Engendering Industries Approach](#).

¹⁸ USAID Climate Links. [Climate Gender Equity Fund](#).

¹⁹ <https://www.saveonenergy.com/resources/women-in-energy/>



Recommendations

Recommendations for the Public and Private Sectors

I. Governments can:

- **Set targets and quotas for direct funding** to women's organizations and businesses in green and blue economic initiatives. Prioritize trust building and long-term commitment between private sector, governments, small and midsize enterprises, and civil society organizations.
- **Conduct gender equality and social inclusion analysis.** Adapt GESI analysis processes to better measure intersectional gender and social barriers and opportunities in green and blue sectors and within male-dominated STEM industries. Develop GESI action plans with highly actionable recommendations.
- **Engage family systems.** This includes fathers, brothers, and uncles as allies, as well as mothers-in-law, and additional wives in polygamous households.
- **Work with whole community systems to address harmful gender norms,** including gender-based violence, in all green and blue sector initiatives. Ensure that responsible norms and risk mitigation strategies are co-designed and supported in partnership with women's rights organizations, traditional and religious leaders, youth groups, and other community-based platforms.
- **Connect women to formal employment options.** Expand the focus of women's economic empowerment beyond just entrepreneurship and include formal green and blue employment opportunities. This includes for smallholder rural farmers.

II. Private companies can:

- **Integrate or strengthen gender equality and social inclusion strategies** and **intersect them with environmental and climate strategies** to strengthen corporate social responsibility and sustainability plans.
- **Invest in diverse women talent pipelines in the renewable energy sector,** professional development opportunities, and decent work policies.
- **Support green and blue sector job mentorships**—including peer-to-peer—to help expand women's technical knowledge, market access, and advocacy skills.

III. Both the public and the private sectors can:

- **Invest in inclusive co-creation processes** in which diverse women’s organizations and businesses—including ones that are indigenous or are led by young women or those with disabilities—co-design green and blue sector projects.
- **Trust women to take the lead.** Women understand the realities of their communities, including of the most marginalized. Prioritize women’s decision-making power in all green and blue economic investment initiatives in which investors and all involved parties see as a win-win.
- **Support inclusive policies** as part of growth strategies. The public and private sectors can work together to collect sex, age, and disability disaggregated data to understand impact and return of investment on inclusion initiatives.
- **Reward inclusion advancements to motivate companies.** Engendering Industries’ partner, Tata Power-DDL, was named one of the top 75 of India’s ‘Best Workplaces for Women’ at the 2019 CII ENCON Awards. This incentivized them to push even harder for gender equality within the workplace. As a result, they were declared the grand winner in the ‘Gender Equality and Empowering Women’ category of the 10th Greentech CSR India Awards 2023.
- **Invest in reasonable accommodations and partner with women with disabilities’ businesses** trying to break their way into green and blue sector markets.



Recommendations for Women Leaders in Sustainable Economies

- **Focus the majority of NGO and business efforts on green and blue solutions, rather than barriers.** Prioritize risk analysis and mitigation plans.
- **Craft a compelling communication and marketing strategy** that emphasizes the urgency of addressing climate change and other environmental challenges.
- **Get educated on sustainable global fish marketing trends**, acquire adjacent skills, and integrate sustainable fishing standards into all business practices.
- **Create care and other support services for women**—including affordable technology to alleviate domestic burdens—throughout all parts of green and blue value chains, especially at the lower tiers of the corporate ladder.
- **Advocate for mandatory policies and trainings** in green and blue workplaces to address harmful social norms and discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and disability.
- **Respect ancestral knowledge. Partner with indigenous and rural groups** to integrate their expertise into green and blue economic practices per region.
- **Create psycho-social support mechanisms** within larger green and blue economic initiatives to increase women leaders' impact and help prevent burnout. Talk through strategies to support self-care and address self-doubt with mentors and networks. Celebrate the small wins in women led economic initiatives.



What's Next

Counterpart, EnCompass LLC, Chemonics International, and Saudat Salami Foundation will continue to convene and collaborate with public, private, and civil society partners to co-create tools that address the many complex issues associated with women and the green and blue economies.

We invite those who are interested to contact WE@counterpart.org.



ANNEX

Resource List for Supporting Global Women's Leadership in the Green and Blue Economies

[March 5, 2024, Event Recording](#) on Global Women's Leadership

[Women in the Sustainable Economy \(WISE\)](#) U.S. Government Initiative

USAID (workwithusaid.gov)

[Climate Gender Equity Fund \(CGEF\)](#) and [Gender Equity and Equality Action Fund](#)

[USAID Engendering Industries program](#) and [Gender Equality Achievements](#)

[Engendering Industries Best Practices Framework for Male-Dominated Industries](#)

[2022–2030 USAID Climate Strategy](#)

[2023 USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy](#)

US STATE DEPARTMENT

[Equal Stake in the Soil](#) (SGWI-led WISE initiative)

[Building Economic Inclusion in the Blue Economy \(BELUU\)](#) (SGWI-led WISE)

[BELUU Community of Practice](#)- women's economic empowerment in the Pacific Islands

[BELUU Innovation Grant](#)

[Global Girls Creating Change \(G2C2\)](#) for girls' leadership in climate action under BELUU

GLOBAL ALLIANCES AND SUSTAINABLE WOMEN-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

[Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet \(GEAPP\)](#)

[Powering People and Planet Report](#) explores GEAPP progress made

[Gender Equality in the Sustainable Energy Transition Report](#), UN Women

[RISE grant challenge](#), supported by the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#), offers grants for initiatives addressing gender-based violence in the environment sector.

[WomHub Incubator](#), Accelerator and Co-Working Hub for Female Founders in STEM

[Anacafé](#) in Guatemala

[Consortium for Sustainable Tuna Fisheries](#) in Indonesia

[Saudat Salami Foundation](#) in Nigeria