



Policy Brief - Dakar, November 2018



# THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY POWER PLANTS AND PROJECTS IN WEST AFRICA

## WHAT APPROACH FOR A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE ENERGY TRANSITION ?

### Context

In recent years, the interest in renewable energy investments has led to increasing funding from private and public sources of renewable energy projects in Africa. These new investments are benefiting from Africa's huge renewable energy potential and the lower cost of renewable energy, particularly wind power, geothermal energy and solar energy in particular. This is the case in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali and several other countries in West Africa and beyond. This trend, which has just begun, can be expected to accelerate in the near future in light of programs such as the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) supported by the African Union or the initiative. SE4ALL of the United Nations.

The multiplication of these projects of renewable energy power plants, in addition to existing decentralized electrification projects, aims at meeting the essential and immediate need of access and energy security of the African populations<sup>1</sup> and fight against climate change at the same time. These projects, however, pose a problem in terms of their social impact<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, these new and sometimes existing renewable energy projects often do not always benefit local populations, in terms of jobs, access to energy, land protection, etc., considering sometimes regulations on independent energy production, the level of education and training, etc., renewable energy power plants that are required to inject their production directly into the national conventional grid may not, for instance, directly benefit the populations of the areas where these plants are located in terms of access to energy.

In addition, although there are jobs in the construction or implementation and operation of RE projects, these do not create much skilled and sustainable jobs for locals because of the lack of education of the surrounding population.

The land occupied by the projects and power plants is also often a shortfall for local people who used these lands for other purposes. Compensation is sometimes not consistent and just temporary.

Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) should normally be able to manage all of these noted deficiencies if Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMP) are properly implemented. This does not seem to be the case, highlighting the limitations of monitoring the implementation of these ESMPs.

There are, however, examples of good practices that can be used to inform the implementation of renewable energy projects as part of a just and sustainable energy transition.

<sup>1</sup>In West Africa 57% of the population does not have access to electricity.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the case of Ghana, where the Akkosombo dam has flooded a large part of the land and it is precisely the inhabitants of these few islands in this lake that are the only communities in Ghana that do not have much access to electricity. The impact is often greater in the case of hydroelectric plants.

**Example:** Malicounda solar power plant in Senegal, where with adequate real compensation mechanisms, community participation in capital in kind, entry into capital, annual dividends are paid to the community, etc.

It is in this context that, ENDA, CEAS Burkina and Mali Folkecenter within the INFORSE WA network, have begun an initial process to determine an approach that can ensure a fair and inclusive energy transition of RE projects for the benefit of the populations concerned.

### Initial Dialogues: Key Findings and Recommendations

The dialogues initiated in the three countries, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal around the social content of the major renewable electricity generation infrastructures (solar, wind, hydroelectricity, etc.) have led to the following preliminary key conclusions and recommendations:

- The need to put in place a Guide for local authorities to help them better take into account the concerns of their communities in major renewable energy projects
- Prioritization of access to electricity for residents for reasons of equity and justice and the development of local capacities for the creation of sustainable jobs for young people
- Need for inclusive local governance for good participation and consideration of community concerns in land management and economic benefits from renewable energy projects
- Deployment of good communication and transparency in the development and implementation of projects involving development actors at local level throughout the duration of the project

These important findings and recommendations are the results of preliminary work under the ACEWA project. They set the stage for further expanded dialogues and further in-depth analysis to arrive at an approach that can benefit all parties.

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