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## BREAKING BARRIERS:

### Daniel Iyoha-Ojie and Pramod Kumar Mishra

*Engendering Industries partners Daniel Iyoha-Ojie, Change Management Coordinator at the Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC), and Pramod Kumar Mishra, the Head of Distribution Planning and Project Management at BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), sat down with Engendering industries to discuss the importance of male engagement in advancing workforce gender equality.*

#### **PRAMOD, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENGAGE MEN TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY?**

We know in our society that policies are historically created and driven by men, so it is very, very important to engage men in the transformative journey to shift those policies and norms. We have also observed, in most cases, that if we leave men behind and just try to transform and empower women, men may also push back and be counterproductive. On the other hand, if you help men break existing gender stereotypes and engage in equity, then they can become valuable catalysts for change.

**DANIEL, HOW DO YOU ENGAGE MEN? WHAT ARE SOME METHODS THAT WORK?** Men need to have an “ah ha” moment. At IBEDC, we create this moment using a gender equality narrative that’s easy to understand: we tie it to the business. We recently ran a program for all male supervisors in the company and used messaging that illustrates how diversifying their teams would improve performance. This helped them warm to the concept of gender equality. We also target the men who drive gender stereotypes, like the belief that men can’t show vulnerability and still be considered a man. If we can get the alpha males to change their behavior, other men will follow. We’ve worked with these men to change the narrative; it makes you more of a man to be vulnerable.

**PRAMOD, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS BRPL HAS WORKED TO COMBAT GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE WORKPLACE?** At BRPL we push back against gender stereotypes using data. It is a gender myth that women are soft and cannot hold field roles. It's a myth that women aren't interested in these types of jobs and prefer to work in an admin role in an airconditioned office. We wanted to challenge that, so we did a survey. We asked women if they were interested in field roles with higher levels of responsibility. To our surprise, 73% of the women we surveyed were interested in being deployed to the field and going after higher roles. So, the myths were broken and we started working to deploy more women to the field.

**USAID'S ENGENDERING INDUSTRIES RECENTLY LAUNCHED ITS MALE ENGAGEMENT TRAINING, AND IBEDC WAS THE FIRST PARTNER TO PARTICIPATE. DANIEL, WHAT WAS THAT EXPERIENCE LIKE FOR MEN AT YOUR COMPANY?** We had tried to engage men in different ways and had hit a brick wall. What really broke through that brick wall was providing male gender equality champions the opportunity to share their personal stories with other men during the male engagement sessions. This was a core strategy of the USAID program that worked, and one that we will continue to leverage. During the course, one of the trainers, a Rwandan, shared his story. Everybody knows that Rwanda has made a lot of progress towards reaching their development goals. He talked about how he was raised, and the negative impact of traditional expectations of manhood on his life. We learned about how Rwanda has passed laws that promote gender equality, including women's right to property ownership, voting, and other rights. We were able to see an African man—who we identify with—share his vulnerability, which resonated with everybody. The effect was immediate. Several male IBEDC leaders stood up to tell their stories. It was so effective. Having someone speak who has gone through what the other men are going through is so important.

Observing this process in the male engagement workshop was an “ah ha” moment for us at IBEDC. Men are often hard-shelled. But, when the facilitators started using their unique style of male engagement, I was shocked to see how men—including men that are considered hard guys—show vulnerability. It was very therapeutic for most of us. We must continue to engage men to tell and leverage their stories to drive change. Gender equality does not happen in a revolution. It's an evolution. It needs to happen gradually so there is no collateral damage.

**PRAMOD, WHEN MEN BECOME ALLIES TO WOMEN IN AN ORGANIZATION, WHAT HAPPENS?** Male allyship is essential. Consider Madou, my mentee, who I mentioned before. She's a mother who used to commute four hours per day. Her commute was the main pain area in her work and was putting a strain on her life at home. I suggested that she take a field role closer to her home. She initially said no because there was not a single woman in the field, and she worried for her safety. But I followed up with her every week for six months offering her the field position. She finally said, “Ok, let's do it.” We worked with HR to find a strategy to support her in the field and to keep her safe, and we got management support. She now enjoys her job immensely and is a star performer in the field. She has good work-life balance and is even planning to have a second child. So, clearly, women can succeed in the field and clearly, male allyship is important. It was key that I helped pave the way for her.

Her success has started to shift attitudes on my team, which is important. As more women take field roles, the environment changes and women will feel less and less singled out. During that time, I promised her that anything good that happens as a result of her taking the field role would be attributed

to her, and that I would take responsibility for anything bad that happened. This support allowed her to take a risk, and now I have seen her transform. I told her that, one day, she will be our CEO.

**DANIEL, IN YOUR WORK AS A MALE CHAMPION AT IBEDC YOU HAVE TALKED A LOT ABOUT MEN, THE EGO, AND GENDER EQUALITY. TELL US HOW THESE PIECES FIT TOGETHER.** This is something I have talked about for a long time. Men have a lot of ego, and “EGO” stands for “Edging Girls Out.” Men have unconsciously, through our behavior, action, and inaction, prevented women from fully engaging in society. I have two children, a young man named Jethro and a very intelligent young lady named Michelle. I would hate to see a future where Michelle would be taken advantage of, or where Jethro is not taken seriously if he says something “feminine.” I want them to know Daddy fought for them. This is what drives me.

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