



PROMIGAS LOOKS AT THE WORLD

Through a Gender Lens

Promigas, a Colombian energy company, participated in USAID’s Engendering Industries Workforce Gender Equality Accelerated Program. Now, the company is rolling out a strategic plan for gender equality that will impact all facets of their business as well as their philanthropic work.

Cotton top tamarin monkeys flit through the foliage in Colombia’s dry forests, but as trees are cut for cattle and crops, they have become critically endangered. Promigas, an energy company that supplies natural gas to 38 percent of Colombians and 93 percent of Peruvians, has been working to restore the habitat by partnering with local communities and landowners.

“We enter into conservation agreements with families to conserve the forest,” explained Nicolas Gomez, Director of Sustainability at Promigas. But, after taking the Engendering Industries Accelerated Course, he realized that the company’s process was missing key stakeholders. “We only write the agreements with the head of the household, which is usually the father,” he said.

Without engaging women, Promigas was missing valuable insights into community land use that may have limited its conservation effort to save cotton tamarins. But Promigas itself, women hold 40 percent of jobs overall, but only 19 percent of technical roles and only 13 percent of senior management positions. What else was the company missing?

Nicolas and his fellow Director of Sustainability, Edith Sanchez Montes, joined the Engendering Industries Accelerated Program in Bogota, Colombia, to learn how to improve gender equity in their sustainability initiatives. The program crystalized the need to improve equity at all levels of the organization to improve performance. With the support of an Engendering Industries change

management coach, Promigas has developed a gender equity action plan that will impact all elements of its internal corporate practices and external sustainability investments. “Before, we had just bits and pieces of gender equity work all over the place in our company, but now we now have a comprehensive, strategic road map,” Nicolas said.

CONNECTING THE DOTS FOR EQUALITY

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Engendering Industries program is increasing the number of women in male-dominated companies by empowering gender equality champions with training on equity and change management, an extensive guide of best practices to increase equity in the workplace, and the support of a change management coach. The training program uncovers unconscious gender bias, teaches participants how to effectively collect, use and interpret data about equality conditions at their organization, and supports them to develop a strategic gender action plan to improve gender equality.

Engendering Industries encourages participants to look at the world around them through a gender lens by filtering everyday situations at home and work through the course’s teachings about inequality. For Nicolas and Edith, the concept of the gender lens was a revelation that helped them evaluate initiatives across Promigas.

“Every time we’re looking at a topic now, we try to link gender. For example, we’re linking it with our social investments and we’re looking to include more gender considerations in the development of our climate strategy,” he said. “We now see everything as connected: gender has a role in environmental and social issues, and environmental and social issues contribute to gender issues.”

As Nicolas and his sustainability team have worked to adapt their approach with a gender lens, they have also shared materials from Engendering Industries with the Promigas human resources team, which has helped shape an intersectional strategy for equality at the company. Using the Engendering Industries Best Practice Framework for Gender Equality as a guide, Promigas has developed a strategy to address inequity related to gender, age, physical capacity, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. So far, they have focused on training employees in equity topics, including leveraging lessons they learned from Engendering Industries about engaging male stakeholders with workshops on unconscious bias and masculinity.

They are also working to develop baseline data through analysis of existing company archives and through new employee surveys to understand gender equity conditions and set new performance indicators. And they’re sharing some of the data publicly in their annual sustainability report.

“We’ve been setting up the foundations of our strategy, using a lot of the materials and conversations that we had with the Engendering Industries coaches and the instructors, along with materials that already existed at Promigas,” Nicolas said. “Now, our plan is to start rolling this out. As a journey, we know that this is something that will take a couple of years to mature.”

But the effort has already started to make an impact on Promigas’s conservation work, with new stakeholders added to the effort to save the cotton-top tamarin. “I believe that the whole impact is still to be seen, but we have already seen changes since day one because we’ve had more participation and more involvement by engaging women,” Nicolas said.