



POWER AFRICA CASE STUDY GHANA

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY
in Africa's Off-grid Energy Sector

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INTRODUCTION

Women represent half of the world's employment potential, yet they make up only 32 percent of the renewable energy sector workforce worldwide. In Africa's off-grid energy sector, this discrepancy is especially acute, and problematic, as companies race to meet the workforce needs of a rapidly growing sector.

PEG Africa (PEG) is a fast-growing, 400+ person company that provides solar-powered electricity solutions, called solar home systems (SHS), to customers in rural and remote parts of West Africa where the electricity grid does not reach. Small off-grid companies in Africa, such as PEG, must tackle an array of business-related challenges, and gender equality and women's empowerment are not often prioritized. However, integrating gender-inclusive practices can both benefit business performance and increase social impact.

Power Africa supports projects, programs and policies that strive to reduce gender inequalities and promote the effective engagement of both men and women in the energy sector. As part of its ongoing business-related support to PEG, Power Africa identified the opportunity to help the company implement strategic measures to increase internal gender equality and strengthen women's economic opportunities.

CHALLENGE

PEG wanted to create employment opportunities for women and ensure that its solar home products were reaching female customers. PEG was also interested in the business case for gender equality that demonstrates positive business results for more gender-balanced companies. Evidence demonstrates that these benefits include increased profitability, decreased employee turnover, increased employee satisfaction, improved innovation, reduced group-think, enhanced decision-making and a positive reputation.

As a social impact company, gender equality was already aligned with PEG's values. However, amid competing priorities relating to scaling the business, PEG needed assistance to implement gender equality and women's empowerment measures.

SOLUTION

PEG implemented several practical measures that are especially innovative in the SHS sector in Africa, and the company has positioned itself as a trailblazer in creating employment opportunities for women in the sector, while also meeting the energy needs of women in rural West Africa.

PEG conducted a gender baseline assessment that revealed that women were underrepresented in decision-making positions, that PEG's internal policies were not gender-responsive, and that women were not benefitting from field-based positions. In response, PEG developed a Gender Action Plan with support from Power Africa, which included the following objectives:

1. Increase the number of females in decision-making positions by 15 percent to a total of 45 percent female leadership;
2. Strengthen internal policy frameworks and other key internal documents for gender responsiveness;
3. Increase women's employment in field staff positions by 13 percent to a total of 37 percent female field staff.

The Gender Action Plan also included a goal to gain 4,000 more female customers.

Power Africa and PEG identified several good practices that shaped the objectives in the Gender Action Plan. For each objective, the corresponding activities outlined below were identified, along with targets to be achieved in a one-year period (January 2018 – December 2018).

Gender Project Officer

PEG recruited a full-time Gender Project Officer to drive implementation of the Gender Action Plan and ensure that gender equality was institutionalized at PEG.

Mentorship Program

To develop female leaders, PEG implemented a three-month pilot mentorship program that paired high-performing, mid-level managers with male and female director-level employees, including the CEO, and provided a framework of leadership metrics to follow. Mentors and mentees alike rated the program as a success, and mentorship is now available to all high-performing, mid-level managers on a semi-annual basis.

Pay Gap Analysis and Promotion Data Analysis

PEG conducted a pay gap analysis at their Ghana headquarters to understand the difference, if any, in the average pay between men and women. The pay gap discovered resulted from a lack of equality at senior-level positions, rather than an equal-pay-for-equal-work discrepancy. As female leadership increased at PEG between June and November 2018, the pay gap decreased by 24 percent.

Data on promotions revealed that, on average, women work 79 days (nearly a full quarter) more than men before their first promotion, and 80 days more than men before being promoted a second time. The data show that even though all PEG employees should work 180 days before being promoted, it is far more likely for a man to be promoted before this minimum than for a woman.

Based on the analysis, PEG recognized that the company needed to standardize the promotions process. A standardized promotions policy was developed to ensure that there are concrete qualifications for receiving a promotion that include the past two performance review ratings, tenure in the position, and manager feedback. The policy removes conscious and unconscious bias from the promotions process and ensures equal opportunity for male and female staff to advance.

Gender-responsive Policies

Gender-responsive policies acknowledge gender gaps and identify measures to address the discrepancies. In pursuit of a more gender-responsive policy framework, PEG adopted a flexible working hours policy and a paternity policy, in addition to the standardized promotions policy. PEG also created an overarching Gender Equality Policy to clearly articulate its commitment to gender equality in recruitment and hiring, job assignments, bonuses and promotions, pay and benefits and training. The policy prohibits any form of gender-based harassment, and clearly states that “PEG seeks to actively deconstruct negative stereotypes and the delegation of specific gender roles.”

Gender-inclusive Recruitment

In all job vacancy announcements, the company now states that, “PEG is an equal opportunity employer committed to diversity. All qualified candidates regardless of age, sex, ethnicity, race and religion are encouraged to apply.” The inclusion of this statement sends an important and attractive message to potential applicants about PEG’s values and demonstrates that diversity is welcome at the company.

PEG also committed to ensuring that more CVs from female candidates are considered, and intentionally searched for skilled female candidates. When working with recruiters, PEG indicated an interest in receiving CVs from female candidates and did not proceed with a shortlist until qualified female candidates were included in the pool for consideration.

Targeted Sales to Female Customers

To reach more female customers, PEG tested a new sales model in the Northern Region of Ghana targeting women’s savings groups, called village savings and loans associations (VSLAs). PEG also created three new VSLAs to specifically save for the PEG solar home system and is exploring opportunities to create more groups. This sales model expands energy access to more female customers and provides additional economic opportunities for women.



A PEG Brand Ambassador engages with potential customers (Credit: Laura Allan)

Creating New Employment Opportunities for Women in Rural Areas

Increasing the number of female field staff, an objective in the Gender Action Plan, was the most significant challenge faced by PEG and Power Africa. The largest staffing need in the field is for Direct Sales Representatives (DSRs) who travel to remote areas selling SHS solutions door-to-door. Most of PEG’s DSRs are male. Recruitment and retention of female DSRs is an ongoing challenge, as these positions involve travelling long distances at one’s own cost, long working days, and the possibility of sleeping in unfamiliar villages. Typically, in the rural Ghanaian context, women have family responsibilities that make these conditions extremely undesirable. Safety is also a concern.

To increase employment opportunities for female DSRs, PEG created new field staff positions – Brand Ambassadors – to support their outreach to VSLAs. PEG hired a VSLA Program Coordinator who recruited six female Brand Ambassadors. This model of targeted sales to groups of mostly women is conducive to the recruitment of female sales agents, as it removes the burden of travelling door-to-door to reach individual customers. Moreover, it leverages the first-hand experience and understanding that women have regarding the impact of energy access, particularly in the home, to pitch and bolster sales to female customers.

BENEFITS

The senior management team reported that a more gender-balanced leadership following the interventions led to increased collaboration, more meaningful engagement in meetings, and better problem-solving efficiency. Male managers are more willing to engage women in roles in which they would not previously have been considered. Female employees are emboldened to share their ideas in meetings now that a greater number of female leaders are visible, and they feel that they have greater opportunity to be noticed. Female leaders are seen both as role models and as evidence of genuine equal opportunity for advancement in the company, which may, in part, explain the decrease in employee turnover by 30 percent compared with the pre-Gender Action Plan year.



Members of PEG’s Senior Management Team at PEG Headquarters, Accra, Ghana (Credit: Nick Adatsi)

RESULTS

The implementation of gender-inclusive practices in PEG demonstrates that gender equality has an impact on business performance. In a 12-month period, PEG achieved a 14 percent increase in female leadership. At the end of the Gender Action Plan implementation period, the female members of the senior management team comprised 8 of 18 positions (44 percent), compared to 4 of 13 (30 percent) before the Gender Action Plan was implemented. Feedback from the senior management team and discussions with employees revealed a tangible positive impact on operations via this demographic shift in leadership.

The increase in female leadership at PEG coincided with a 60 percent growth in revenue, and earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) improved by 26 percent. Importantly, PEG and Power Africa also observed a tangible corporate cultural shift. According to Hugh Whalan, PEG’s Co-Founder and CEO, “Gender equality begins to drive itself. The more women are represented in leadership, the less one has to push for gender equality because it is visible. This is what is beginning to happen at PEG.”

ABOUT POWER AFRICA

Power Africa is comprised of 12 U.S. Government Agencies, over 145 private companies, and 18 bilateral and multilateral development partners to support sub-Saharan governments by working together to increase the numbers of people with access to power. Power Africa’s goal is to achieve 30,000 MW of new generated power and 60 million new connections by 2030 to reach 300 million Africans.

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