USAID is proud to work with the Liberian Electricity Corporation (LEC) in their commitment to improve gender equality as part of their path to long-term success.

When women serve as leaders and employees of companies – including those in the energy sector – businesses benefit and performance improves. USAID’s Engendering Utilities program seeks to strengthen the energy sector by increasing economic opportunities for women and improving gender equality in the workplace. In March 2019, LEC began working with USAID through the Engendering Utilities program to collaboratively design tailored interventions that directly increase opportunities for women within the company and enhance the utility’s operations.

LEC was established in 1973. After the country’s electricity infrastructure was destroyed during the Liberian Civil Wars, LEC’s efforts have focused on restoring the Monrovia grid, expanding mini-grids, and increasing off-grid access in rural areas. LEC prioritized the rehabilitation and recommissioning of the 88 megawatt (MW) Mt. Coffee hydropower plant, and a management contract is in place to operate and maintain LEC’s systems, build staff capacity, and improve performance.

LEC currently serves around 49,230 residential and 500 commercial customers. Of their total workforce, only 14 percent are women. However, LEC recognizes the importance of gender equality, and the utility hopes to increase their gender balance and encourage more women to enter the electricity sector.
LIBERIA'S ELECTRICITY SECTOR

Liberia has been focused on rebuilding the electricity infrastructure that was destroyed during the Liberian Civil Wars and by post-war looting. After President Sirleaf’s election in 2006, the new government focused on “small light today, big light tomorrow”, with projects to increase electricity access in the country. While around 20 percent of the country now has electricity access, Liberia still has one of the lowest access rates in the world. Liberia currently has around 126 MW of installed generation capacity, 88 MW of which is from the rehabilitated Mt. Coffee hydropower plant. The balance is generated from heavy fuel oil and diesel generators.

According to Liberia’s Gender Minister, energy is one of the least gender-diverse sectors in the country, which is especially noteworthy considering that women have otherwise achieved parity in Liberia’s workforce, at 50.6 percent according to a Pew Research Center analysis of International Labour Organization (ILO) data. The ILO also reports that 72.2 percent of Liberian women participate in the labor market, more than the global average. However, women are more likely than men to be employed in the informal sector.

GENDER EQUITY IN ACTION

Prior to engaging with Engendering Utilities, LEC initiated gender equality improvements with support from Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) Liberia, most notably through the development and adoption of a Gender and Social Inclusion (GSI) Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy. The overall objective of the GSI Policy is to identify and mitigate issues of gender disparity throughout the company, including a goal to reach 40/60 gender parity.

To continue building on their positive efforts, LEC is working with USAID through the Engendering Utilities program to assess and identify high-impact interventions that can improve gender equality within the organization. Through Engendering Utilities, USAID is providing tailored coaching to LEC staff on gender equity and business best practices, and select utility personnel will participate in a 12-month Gender Equity Executive Leadership Program in collaboration with Georgetown University.

A dedicated change management coach provided by the Engendering Utilities program is working with LEC to identify opportunities to further advance the company's GSI Policy, implement their Sexual Harassment Policy, and address gender equality challenges. Through this coaching, the utility will develop a tailored action plan to best fit their needs. LEC will also place a strong emphasis on engaging influential male leaders as champions of gender equality.
IMPACT

In addition to the Gender and Social Inclusion and Sexual Harassment policies, LEC’s commitment to gender equality is further exemplified through other company programs and efforts, such as the creation of a Gender and Social Inclusion Department in July 2018. The GSI Department was established with the goal of strengthening LEC’s capacity for socially inclusive and gender responsive planning and implementation. A major function of this department is to develop gender policies and implement the GSI Policy, addressing gender and social inclusion issues with all of the utility’s stakeholders.

LEC views the Engendering Utilities program as complementary to its goals for organizational change and improved performance for the utility, including the succession training program. Some key priorities and expectations that LEC has in its participation include improving organizational performance and workplace culture with a strong emphasis on core corporate values and gender equality, effectively implementing their Sexual Harassment Policy, and integrating gender equality within succession plans.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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