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ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE LIBERIA ELECTRICITY CORPORATION

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 and water sectors – businesses benefit and performance improves. **USAID’s Engendering Utilities program seeks to strengthen the energy and water sectors 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.

After the country’s electricity infrastructure was destroyed during the Liberian Civil Wars, LEC’s efforts focused on restoring the Monrovia grid and increasing off-grid access in rural areas.¹ LEC currently serves around 49,200 residential and 500 commercial customers.² While LEC employs around 850 staff, only 17 percent are women. These women are holding executive management (33 percent), senior management (24 percent) as well as middle management (30 percent) positions. However, the highest percentage of female staff (27 percent) works in non-management/non-supervisory positions. Moreover, 21 percent of technicians and 32 percent of field/line workers are women. **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. In the coming years, LEC will focus on achieving a 40/60 gender parity within the utility.**

PHOTO: SUZANNE MAIA / USAID

LIBERIA'S ENERGY SECTOR

Liberia's 14-year civil war devastated the country's physical and organizational infrastructure. The social, political, and traditional governance systems were destroyed, and the economy completely collapsed.³ 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.⁴ In 2017, around 20 percent of the country had access to electricity, which means Liberia has one of the lowest access rates in the world.⁵

GENDER EQUALITY IN LIBERIA

Since 2005, and the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as the first female head of state in Africa, significant progress has been made, but the consequences of war remain particularly burdensome for women.⁶ Despite these issues, Liberia is one of the countries with the highest share of women in the workforce.⁷ Currently, the labor force participation for women is approximately 55 percent.⁸ Women in Liberia are major players in the agricultural sector, accounting for the majority of the agricultural labor force, yet women do not participate in the most profitable sectors, such as infrastructure, public works, cash crop farming, and mining.⁹ In Liberia, a man earns on average only two percent more than a woman.¹⁰

Liberia's Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection argued that despite the significance of the energy sector to all aspects of society, it remains one of the least gender diverse sectors in Liberia and globally, as a result of systemic challenges, such as "cultural imbalances, limited access to infrastructure and lack of women leadership in major roles."¹¹

GENDER EQUALITY 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 participated in the 12-month Gender Equity Executive Leadership Program (GEELP) 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 GSI 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.



PHOTO: SUZANNE MAIA / USAID

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 participated in 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.

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NOTES

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