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## ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE REG, RWANDA

USAID partners with Rwanda Energy Group (REG) to improve women's participation in Kenya's energy sector.

When women serve as leaders and employees, businesses benefit and company performance improves. **USAID's Engendering Utilities program works to increase women's participation in the energy and water sectors globally.** In January 2020, Engendering Utilities partnered with [REG](#) to design workplace initiatives that will expand job opportunities for women and enhance the utility's performance.

REG is a government-owned energy utility in Rwanda responsible for the import, export, procurement, generation, transmission, distribution and sale of electricity in the country. A large state employer, the utility has over 1,300 employees, but only 17 percent are women.

**Recognizing that diverse teams build better businesses, REG partnered with USAID to increase gender balance across the company and encourage more women to enter Rwanda's energy sector.**

## RWANDA'S ENERGY SECTOR

Rwanda's energy sector is growing rapidly. In 1995 less than one percent of the population had access to electricity. Today, 85 percent of the urban population and 24 percent of the rural population have power.<sup>1</sup> Twenty years ago Rwanda relied almost entirely on hydropower, but drought and poor maintenance of dams led to drastic electricity shortages between 2000 and 2007. The government pursued strategies to diversify the country's energy sources, and today Rwanda generates power from thermal, hydroelectric, and solar, and nearly 90 percent of Rwanda's energy comes from renewable sources.<sup>2</sup> Despite this, estimates suggest that Rwanda is producing less than ten percent of its electricity potential.<sup>3</sup> The Government of Rwanda has set targets to increase power generation and achieve universal access to electricity by 2024.

**Engendering Utilities' work with REG will ensure women can capitalize on increased investment in Rwanda's energy sector as the industry and labor force continue to grow.**

## GENDER EQUALITY IN RWANDA'S WORKFORCE

A complex web of contributing factors prevents women in Rwanda from joining the formal workforce; particularly the male-dominated energy sector. This industry represents a key growth area for Rwanda, and the exclusion of women from opportunities in this market deepens the country's gender equality divide.

Following the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsis, Rwanda's population was 60-70 percent women.<sup>4</sup> President Paul Kagame began pushing to increase women's participation in the workforce, and sought to create opportunities for women to pursue an education and career.<sup>5</sup> Under Kagame's leadership, Rwanda made strides in expanding access to education for both girls and boys, and the country is now ranked first for gender parity in primary and secondary school enrollment.<sup>6</sup> But educational limitations remain, and today only nine percent of tertiary school graduates from STEM programs are women.<sup>7</sup>

Over 84 percent of women and 83 percent of men participate in the labor force,<sup>8</sup> and Rwanda has the highest number of female legislative representation in the world, with 60 percent of parliament seats held by women.<sup>9</sup> Despite this progress, women are more likely to work in agriculture, while men are more likely to work in more technical sectors—including water, energy, and infrastructure.<sup>10</sup>

Harmful cultural practices and gender norms further impact a woman's ability to access diverse employment opportunities in Rwanda. Women in Rwanda spend an average of five hours on unpaid care work per day compared to an hour and a half for men.<sup>11</sup> When employment policies and practices are inflexible, women are unable to balance the responsibilities of work and home.

Violence against women in Rwanda compounds these issues. Over 40 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence; a number believed to be low due to underreporting.<sup>12</sup> Domestic violence has real costs for companies. One study estimates that violence against women costs \$1.5 trillion in direct costs and lost productivity, globally.<sup>13</sup> Employers that work to reduce and mitigate violence and harassment both at home and work improve the well-being and productivity of men and women at work.

**Engendering Utilities supports companies—like REG—to consider and respond to the diverse factors that reduce women's workforce participation by building inclusive policies and practices that benefit men, women, and businesses in the energy sector.**

## GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTION AT REG

Engendering Utilities uses an [evidence-based methodology](#) to support women's participation in Rwanda's energy sector. The program supports REG to increase opportunities for women by introducing gender equality initiatives at each phase of the employee lifecycle: from reducing gender bias at the hiring stage, to creating strategies that will help retain female talent and improve corporate culture change that benefits both women and men. Using a globally recognized [framework](#) for change, Engendering Utilities is supporting REG in its goal of increasing gender equality across the company's business practices.

A dedicated change management coach supports the utility and works directly with three staff to become agents of change within REG. A baseline assessment is conducted to identify gaps and opportunities for improving gender equality across the company. The findings are used to develop a strategic action plan that will facilitate REG's gender equality goals. This is supplemented by the program's partnership with the Georgetown University McDonough School of Business, which delivers the [Gender Equity Executive Leadership Program](#) (GEELP) to three utility employees. The GEELP is a best-in-class 12-month executive course that empowers decision-makers to integrate gender equality initiatives into their corporate structure.

Engendering Utilities will support and accelerate gender equality initiatives already underway at REG as part of the broader strategic action plan, including:

- **Gender Action Plan, Steering Committee, and Advisor** to increase gender equality across business practices, improve corporate culture, and provide leadership opportunities for women.
- **Creating Gender Equitable Policies**, including a gender policy, sexual harassment policy, and gender equitable HR policies.
- **Connecting Women to the Grid:** REG has initiated a community service program to connect female-headed households to the grid at no cost to the homeowner. Many of the REG technicians who connect the households are women, showing both REG employees and members of the community that women can be effective change agents in the energy sector.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Amanda Valenta**  
Senior Energy Specialist  
Office of Energy and  
Infrastructure, USAID  
[avalenta@usaid.gov](mailto:avalenta@usaid.gov)

**Corinne Hart**  
Senior Advisor for  
Gender and Environment  
Office of Gender Equality and  
Women's Empowerment  
USAID, [cohart@usaid.gov](mailto:cohart@usaid.gov)

**Jessica Menon**  
Program Manager  
Tetra Tech  
[jessica.menon@tetrattech.com](mailto:jessica.menon@tetrattech.com)

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## NOTES

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