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ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE

Senelec, SENEGAL

USAID partners with Société Nationale d'Electricité du Sénégal (Senelec) to improve women's participation in Senegal'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 February 2020, Engendering Utilities partnered with [Senelec](#) to design workplace initiatives that will expand job opportunities for women and enhance the utility's performance.

Senegal's energy sector has undergone many changes over recent decades. In 1983, the government nationalized the sector and established Senelec as a publicly owned utility.¹ While Senelec originally managed all the activities of the country's public electricity services, in 1998 the government unbundled the sector and opened the production and distribution of electricity in rural areas to the private sector. Senelec retained control of urban electricity distribution while the Senegalese Rural Electrification Agency (ASER) took control of rural electrification. Out of a total of approximately 3,125 employees, only 22 percent are women.

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

SENEGAL'S ENERGY SECTOR

Access to electricity in Senegal is slightly higher than in other Sub-Saharan African countries. Over 90 percent of urban and 35 percent of the rural populations have access to electricity.² However, the country's demand for electricity consistently outpaces its supply, and Senegal imports significant amounts of diesel and gas to power the country.³ Despite this, over one million households are without power.⁴ Senegal obtains thermal power from 11 thermal power plants, and hydropower is generated almost entirely from the Manantali hydropower plant, which is part of the Western African Power Pool Project.⁵

Senegal has significant potential to develop wind and solar energy, and the country is pursuing these natural resources in an effort to diversify its energy sector. Private investments have helped the country initiate construction on wind, thermal, and solar infrastructure, including the Senergy 1 solar PV plant, the largest solar farm in West Africa.⁶ The government of Senegal has set energy targets that include increasing production of oil to 100,000 barrels per day by 2022, increasing hydropower capacity to 200 GWh, and achieving universal access to electricity by 2025. The country's *Le Plan Sénégal Emergent 2023* also outlines goals for universal electricity access and achieving middle-income status by 2035.⁷

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

GENDER EQUALITY IN SENEGAL'S WORKFORCE

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

Only 35 percent of women participate in the Senegalese workforce,⁸ and those that do are more likely to work in the service sector and not in industry.⁹ Over 70 percent of women in the workforce are engaged in vulnerable employment, which can be characterized by low wages and poor working conditions.¹⁰ As a result of these disparities, women also make significantly less than men. In Senegal, a man earns on average 116 percent more than a woman.¹¹

Harmful cultural practices and gender norms further impact a woman's ability to join the formal workforce in Senegal. Education in Senegal can be expensive, and boys are more likely to remain in school while girls stay home to support household tasks.¹² Girls are also married and give birth at a very early age, which disrupts their education. As of 2017, eight percent of women ages 20 to 24 had been married by age 15,¹³ and nearly 30 percent were married by age 18.¹⁴ While secondary school completion rates are low for both girls and boys, only 14 percent of girls complete secondary school compared to 26 percent of boys. Only nine percent of girls enroll in tertiary level programs,¹⁵ and only 30 of those that do pursue an education in STEM fields.¹⁶

Gender-based violence in Senegal compounds these issues, and 30 percent of women have experienced either physical or sexual violence.¹⁷ Domestic violence cases rarely make it to court¹⁸ and its acceptance is widespread in Senegal.¹⁹ Furthermore, only 14 percent of women participate in decision making related to their own healthcare, household purchases, and visiting family.²⁰ Female Genital Mutilation is

also practiced in Senegal, and 78 percent of women ages 15 to 49 living in the southern part of the country have undergone the procedure.²¹ 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.²² 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 Senelec—to consider and respond to 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 SENELEC

Engendering Utilities uses an [evidence-based methodology](#) to support women’s participation in Senegal’s energy sector. The program supports Senelec 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 Senelec 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 Senelec. 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 Senelec’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. These strategies will support Senelec in its goal of achieving gender equality in its workforce, in line with national gender strategies that aim to achieve parity in leadership and governance of Senegalese public agencies.

Organizational readiness for change is in place at Senelec, and senior leadership has expressed commitment to:

- Formulate and adopt a gender strategy for the utility.
- Devise recruitment strategies to increase the number of women in technical positions.
- Promote the interest of girls and young women to pursue STEM studies to increase the number of qualified female candidates.

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NOTES

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