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ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE DELSUR, EL SALVADOR

USAID is proud to work with Distribuidora de Electricidad DELSUR S.A. de C.V. (DELSUR) in their commitment to improve gender equality in the energy sector 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 these sectors by increasing economic opportunities for women and improving gender equality in the workplace.** DELSUR is 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.

DELSUR was established in 1996 to distribute energy to the south-central zone of El Salvador. DELSUR currently services around 25 percent of the national market, with more than 390,000 customers.¹ Currently around 320 employees work at the utility, out of which almost 20 percent are women. Half of the company’s executive management consists of women, while female employees account for 34 percent of middle management positions and 15 percent of the company’s engineers. However, only three percent of technicians are female and in 2019 there were zero female field/line workers employed at the utility.² **Women’s empowerment is important to DELSUR, and the company has participated in many programs to increase their gender balance and support of local communities. In the coming years, the utility will focus on becoming a leader in gender equality in El Salvador and Latin America.**

PHOTO: DELSUR

EL SALVADOR'S ENERGY SECTOR

El Salvador's energy sector was restructured in 1996, with the formation of new market entities and the unbundling of generation, transmission, distribution, and commercialization. The country currently has 18 generation companies and eight distribution companies, with a single government-owned transmission company responsible for the maintenance and expansion of the transmission system.³ Nearly 60 percent of El Salvador's electricity comes from renewable sources, namely hydropower and geothermal.⁴ To reduce their dependence on fossil fuels, increase energy security, and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, El Salvador seeks to boost renewable energy production. In 2017, El Salvador opened the largest solar power plant in Central America,⁵ and the construction of the country's first wind farm was announced in 2018 and is expected to come online in 2020.⁶

GENDER EQUALITY IN EL SALVADOR

El Salvador has made significant strides to reduce inequality, such as the Gender Equality Pact, which was signed in 2016 to fulfill the rights of Salvadoran women and calls for increased efforts towards women's inclusion and equality.⁷ These developments have had positive effects on girls' and women's health and livelihoods, yet gender gaps persist in women's political participation, employment, wages and financial inclusion, and other areas.⁸

Currently, only 47 percent of women participate in the labor market in El Salvador, compared to 79 percent of men.⁹ Most women (78 percent) work in services, and only 18 percent of women compared to 25 percent of men work in industry.¹⁰ Moreover, 28 percent of firms in El Salvador have female top managers.¹¹ However, the gender wage gap between men and women is 14 percent and according to the 2014 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, the average wage paid to women for comparable work was 55 percent of compensation paid to men.¹² Of the women who are not participating in the workforce, seven out of ten cite domestic work and safety concerns as reasons for their inactivity.¹³ The Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women was passed in 2011, but women still experience gender-based violence, as well as discrimination and hostility from authorities.¹⁴ Safety concerns are warranted, as the rate of violent crime against women in El Salvador is now the third-highest in the world.¹⁵

GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTION

Prior to working with Engendering Utilities, DELSUR had already taken initiative to improve gender equity. These efforts are visible in their management team, where four of the six department managers are women. To continue building on their positive efforts, DELSUR is working with USAID through the Engendering Utilities program to assess and identify high-impact interventions that can improve gender equity within the organization. Through Engendering Utilities, USAID is providing tailored coaching to DELSUR staff on gender equality and business best practices, and select utility personnel are participating in the 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 DELSUR to identify opportunities to address perceptions around obstacles women face in career advancement, including their comfort level with technical jobs. Through this coaching, the utility will

develop a tailored action plan to best fit their needs. DELSUR will also place a strong emphasis on engaging influential male leaders as champions of gender equality.

IMPACT

Over the past decade, DELSUR has led and participated in a variety of projects to encourage women's participation in the workforce. These projects have ranged from workshops, to trainings, to community involvement for greater DELSUR projects. Below are some examples of the company's programs and efforts prior to working with Engendering Utilities:

Workshops for Women Leaders in the Electricity

Sector: DELSUR coordinated the first of these workshops in 2010, with a second workshop in 2012. Attendees included women working in national electric companies as well as companies in Guatemala and Panama. A third workshop was held in early 2018, in partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation Mexico's Renewable Energies and Energy Efficiency in Central America Program. The goal of these workshops is to motivate women in the electricity sector to be leaders and to bridge the gender gaps that continue to exist in the traditionally male-dominated field.

Technical Electrician Training: In 2014, DELSUR trained 20 women as technical electricians, through a 40-hour course and test for university accreditation. The trainees received a certificate of accreditation upon completion of the training, provided by the energy regulatory body. Some of the women received further training as line workers, and are now working on DELSUR's metering team. This training gave women technical skills and the opportunity to enter a line of work which is normally only pursued by men.



PHOTO: DELSUR

Women in Substation Infrastructure Maintenance: Two cohorts of women were contracted by DELSUR for the maintenance of substation infrastructure. This has increased the number of women working for the utility and has given women the opportunity to use and grow their skillset within the energy sector.

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NOTES

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