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ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE EGENCO, MALAWI

USAID is proud to work with Electricity Generation Company Malawi Ltd. (EGENCO) 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 the energy and water sectors by increasing economic opportunities for women and improving gender equality in the workplace.** EGENCO 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.

EGENCO was formed through the restructuring of Malawi’s energy sector, and began operations in 2017.¹ EGENCO currently has 373 MW of installed power generation capacity, and plans to double power generation capacity in the country in the next five years.² EGENCO has a team of 550 employees, but only 11 percent are women. However, one-third of the supervisory board members are women. Approximately 87 percent of female employees at the utility work in non-management/non-supervisory positions. In 2019, there was only one female engineer employed at the company and there are no female field/line workers.³ **EGENCO recognizes the importance of gender equality and social inclusion, and the utility hopes to encourage more women to pursue careers in energy. In the coming years, the utility will focus on embedding the existing gender strategy within the corporate culture to reach a gender ratio of 30:70.**

PHOTO: EGENCO MALAWI

MALAWI'S ENERGY SECTOR

Malawi's electricity generation relies largely on hydroelectric dams, which account for 95 percent of the installed capacity. This leaves Malawi constrained during periods of drought and low water levels.⁴ About 83 percent of Malawi's population live in rural areas and rely on fuel wood for energy supply, and only 12 percent of Malawi's population has access to electricity. Even where electricity is available, supply is insufficient to meet demand and the system is largely unreliable. ⁵

GENDER EQUALITY IN MALAWI

The Republic of Malawi ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1987, and equal rights for men and women are included in the constitution. In 2005, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa was ratified. However, many of these laws are not upheld in rural areas.⁶

While women in Malawi benefit from higher than average labor force participation (73 percent compared to 82 percent for men)⁷, they tend to pursue work in sectors like agriculture, where they make up 70 percent of the workforce.⁸ Consequently, only 6 percent of women work in industry.⁹ Furthermore, women face inequalities with regards to income: in Malawi a man earns on average 53 percent more than a woman.¹⁰

Moreover, child marriage is an issue in Malawi. Although the constitution states a person over 18 years cannot be forced into marriage, survey data indicates that early marriages are relatively widespread. In a 2010 survey, almost 14 percent of women aged 20-49 were married by age 15.¹¹ Furthermore, gender-based violence (GBV) has been a serious issue faced by women in Malawi, and USAID declared the country to be one of 35 GBV-priority countries.¹²

GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTION

Prior to working with USAID and Engendering Utilities, EGENCO took initiative to improve gender equity, most notably their development and adoption of a company gender and social inclusion and anti-harassment policy. The policy's main objective is to strengthen gender equality and social inclusion in all organizational operations, plans, budgets, policies, programs, projects, systems, functions, and structure for the benefit of both employees and customers. This policy was originally developed by ESCOM with the support of the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) Malawi before the unbundling. EGENCO then tailored and adopted the Gender Policy in August 2018, with strong provisions and an outline for implementation throughout the company. MCA Malawi conducted 22 one-day sensitization trainings for employees with respect to the policy. Through their gender policy, EGENCO aims to promote parity in employment between men and women.

To achieve these goals, EGENCO is working with USAID through the Engendering Utilities program since 2018 to assess and identify high-impact interventions that can improve gender equity within the organization. Through Engendering Utilities, USAID is providing tailored coaching to EGENCO staff on gender equity and business best practices and select utility personnel will participate in a 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 supporting EGENCO to identify opportunities to further advance the company's gender policy and address gender equity challenges. Through their program participation, the utility will develop an action plan to best fit their needs. EGENCO 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 anti-harassment policy, EGENCO Malawi's commitment to gender equity is further exemplified through other company programs and efforts:

- **Gender and Social Inclusion Department:** This department, created in May 2018, was established to identify opportunities for EGENCO to advance the gender policy. The department will provide direction and guidance to 15 gender focal persons from departments throughout the company. The gender focal persons were identified and trained by MCA as part of the sensitization trainings for the gender policy.
- **Girls Science Camp:** In August 2018, EGENCO sponsored 10 secondary school girls to participate in a Girls Science Camp at the Malawi University of Science and Technology. This camp is an initiative aimed at motivating and inspiring girls to pursue science and technology related fields. Through this initiative, EGENCO hopes to support and encourage women to enter engineering fields and pursue careers in electricity generation.

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NOTES

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- 2 EGENCO. (n.d.) Projects. Retrieved from <http://www.egenco.mw/egenco-projects>
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