



ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE ZCWD, PHILIPPINES

USAID partners with Zamboanga City Water District (ZCWD) to improve women's participation in the Philippines' water 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 April 2020, Engendering Utilities partnered with [ZCWD](#) to design workplace initiatives that will expand job opportunities for women and enhance the utility's performance.

ZCWD is a government-owned and controlled utility in the Philippines that supplies water to the sixth largest city in the country, Zamboanga City. ZCWD has 625 employees, but only 14 percent are women.

Recognizing that diverse teams build better businesses, ZCWD partnered with USAID to increase gender balance across the company and encourage more women to enter the water sector in the Philippines.

THE PHILIPPINES' WATER SECTOR

The Philippines is one of Asia's fastest urbanizing countries, and over half of the country's 92 million people now reside in urban areas.¹ The country's water resources are strained by a number of factors, including rapid population growth, increasing demand for food production, pollution, excessive and inefficient use of water, and climate change.² It is expected that climate change will continue to increase the severity of droughts and deluges.³

Over the past few decades, water supply has not kept pace with the growing population. Many water utilities face financial difficulties because tariffs are too low to recover costs, and systems are too small to work efficiently. Barriers to improving the water supply include institutional fragmentation, lack of sector information, weak sector planning and monitoring, and the poor performance of many water utilities. Low investment, limited access to financing for service expansion, and inadequate support for poor communities exacerbates these challenges.⁴ Women's role in the development of water and sanitation services is critical, as they are both beneficiaries of programs and users of systems.

Engendering Utilities' work with ZCWD will ensure women are able to access opportunities in the Philippines' water sector as the industry and labor force grows.

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PHILIPPINES' WORKFORCE

In 2006 and 2007 the Philippines ranked sixth in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index,⁵ and in 2020 the Philippines had the highest number of women executives holding senior management positions out of 32 countries.⁶ Despite these achievements, complex factors—including gender-based violence and economic disadvantage—affect the livelihoods, health, education, and family life of Filipino women.

Statistics show that women's labor force participation is only 45 percent compared to 72 percent of men, and that women are disadvantaged when it comes to employment opportunities and income parity.⁷ The lack of employment opportunities in the Philippines has led millions of women to out-migrate for work abroad. Female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) incur more costs and face greater security risks compared to their male counterparts.⁸

Gender based violence compounds these factors. While violence against women remains a problem in the Philippines, the associated social stigma causes under-reporting. Research shows that over 15 percent of women have experienced violence by an intimate partner, and that violence against women increases during humanitarian crises—such as the conflict in Marawi between government forces and pro-ISIS militants which displaced 98 percent of the city in 2017.⁹ Sexual harassment is also a prevalent problem, and 60 percent of women surveyed in Metro Manila have experienced sexual harassment.¹⁰

The government of the Philippines has undertaken efforts to address these challenges and improve gender equality across the country, including creating numerous laws and policies that promote gender equality. The Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development is a 30-year plan that outlines the policies, strategies and programs that the government must adopt to enable women's active participation in society and the workforce.¹¹ These policies emphasize coordination and creating a supportive environment for gender equality in the water and sanitation sector.

Engendering Utilities supports companies—like ZCWD—to consider and respond to factors that reduce women’s workforce participation by building inclusive policies and practices that benefit women, men, and businesses in the water sector.

GENDER EQUALITY IN ACTION AT ZCWD

Engendering Utilities uses an [evidence-based methodology](#) to support women’s participation in the Philippines energy sector. The program supports ZCWD 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 ZCWD in its goal of becoming the employer of choice for women in the Philippines.

A dedicated change management coach supports the utility and works directly with three staff to become agents of change within ZCWD. 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 ZCWD’s gender equality goals, including achievement of a national mandate for 30 percent of company employees to be women. 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 ZCWD, including:

- **Adoption of a Sexual Harassment Policy**, which clearly defines the behaviors that are considered sexual harassment, deters these behaviors, and outlines the process, procedures, and actions that are taken when a complaint is received.
- **Recruit and Promote Women** by reframing position descriptions, educating technical teams to incorporate gender considerations into proposals, and expanding recruitment outlets to diversify the pool of applicants. The utility has also identified the need to include more women on the board and in executive leadership positions. The utility will generate sex disaggregated data and place a strong emphasis on engaging influential male leaders as champions of gender equality through the development of a male engagement strategy.
- **Mainstreaming Gender into Infrastructure Projects** by building staff capacity and providing trainings on the topics of gender mainstreaming, analysis, planning and budgeting.

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NOTES

¹ Asian Development Bank. (2013). Philippines: Water supply and sanitation sector assessment, strategy, and road map. Mandaluyong City, Philippines.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ JICA. (2008). Philippines Country Gender Profile. Retrieved from:

https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/gender/background/pdf/e08phi.pdf

⁶ Grant Thornton International. (2020). Philippines Has Most Women in Senior Positions. Retrieved from:

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⁷ JICA. (2008). Philippines Country Gender Profile. Retrieved from:

https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/gender/background/pdf/e08phi.pdf

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The ASEAN Post. (2018). Retrieved from: <https://theaseanpost.com/article/push-end-violence-against-women>

¹⁰ US State Department Reports on Human Rights Practices. (2018). Retrieved from: https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/philippines_trashed/

¹¹ JICA. (2008). Philippines Country Gender Profile. Retrieved from:

https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/thematic_issues/gender/background/pdf/e08phi.pdf