



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

The Return on Investment at Tata Power-DDL

Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL) is the largest integrated power company in India, serving over seven million people in North and Northwest Delhi. Only 15 percent of the company's 3500 employees are women, and the utility realized they had an important role to play in increasing gender equality in India; a country with one of the [lowest female workforce participation rates](#) globally.

In 2019 Tata Power began working with [USAID's Engendering Utilities](#) to increase gender equality across the company. By employing more women in non-traditional roles, Tata Power-DDL has increased gender equality and improved utility performance. Engendering Utilities sat down with Bharat Chhabra, Tata Power's Head of HR-Talent Development, to learn about the utility's gender equality initiatives, their impact on women and men at the company, and the ways gender equality is strengthening their business.

Engendering Utilities works with Tata Power-DDL and companies around the world to increase gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within their organizations. Can you describe how Tata Power got started?

This has been a journey, and we are thankful that programs like Engendering Utilities are supporting our initiatives and providing us with expert coaching support. Our journey started with leadership and commitment from our CEO. Tata Power declared gender diversity and inclusion a corporate priority, and we began setting

TATA POWER DELHI DISTRIBUTION LTD. (TATA POWER-DDL)

Formed in 2002, Tata Power-DDL is a joint venture between Tata Power and the government of Delhi.

The company serves around 7 million customers across 510km of North and Northwest New Delhi.

In April 2019, Tata Power-DDL partnered with Engendering Utilities to increase gender equality and economic opportunities for women across the organization.

Of their 3,570 employees, around 15 percent are women.

targets and goals. We wanted to focus on two things: promoting women’s leadership and development, and hiring more women into technical roles. That year we posted a woman in a field operations role for the first time. This was an advancement, and I accompanied her to the field on her first day of work. We were all excited. When we got there, she noticed that there was no separate washroom for her, and we realized that there was no way a woman could comfortably work in our zonal offices with the current facilities in place. You can imagine how she felt, and how we felt as well when we realized this.

That must have felt like a setback on a day you hoped to celebrate a win for women. What did you do?

Several things. First, we created a safe, comfortable, and separate washroom for her that very day. Next we had the civil department make plans to ensure all of our office locations, including our 48 zonal offices and buildings, had safe and hygienic infrastructure for female employees. Working on our physical infrastructure was one piece, but there were other changes that needed to be made. Changes to corporate systems as well as cultural perceptions and attitudes about the roles of women at the company. Particularly with male staff.

Addressing socio-cultural attitudes about gender is not easy. How did the utility tackle this challenge?

Many men in our field operations did not think women should be working in technical areas. Across power utilities in India you will not see many women, and you will particularly not see women in operations roles. We addressed this issue at a corporate level by delivering mandatory training on unconscious bias, diversity, and inclusion. We would ask our male leaders, “Do you have an unconscious bias in your mind when you think about the type of work women should do? Do you have a perception that women cannot do technical work? What role can you play to ensure women have equal opportunities here?” This line of questioning gave them many insights, opened up their minds, and started building an awareness that what they perceive to be “natural” roles for men and women may not be natural after all.



I believe it is men’s responsibility to have conversations with other men about these issues, and I started talking to men working in technical areas. I would tell them: ‘Listen, I have a daughter. You have a daughter. Someday my daughter and your daughter will choose a career, and we will want them

Rajni and Shweta, technicians at Tata Power-DDL in India, are helping the company break the stereotype that technical fields are more suited for men.

BUILDING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Research from around the world suggests a correlation between gender equality and improved company performance. A McKinsey & Company study of 1,000 companies across 12 countries concluded that gender-diverse companies are more profitable than their national industry averages.⁵ Despite this, it can be difficult to convince managers to hire more women, and women's participation in the workforce remains low. Engendering Utilities helps organizations develop a business case for gender equality to persuade senior leadership that equality is good for business. Gender equality can improve productivity, attract a stronger talent pool, and position an organization as the employer of choice for women.

Developing a business case for gender equality is critical for achieving buy-in and strategic action from all staff, particularly senior leadership. The business case provides a justification for undertaking the gender equality program, helps organizations evaluate the benefit, cost, and risk of alternative options and provides a rationale for the preferred solution.

By supporting organizations to identify business priorities and examining sex-disaggregated organizational data, Engendering Utilities helps organizations determine how gender equality will help achieve strategic business goals.

to have a supportive environment as they come up in business. So why not create a more positive working environment for our female staff right now?"

So corporate training is one aspect, but you also need male champions who can promote change, and you need initiatives that will make women feel supported and allow them to realize their full potential.

How did you help women move into new and more challenging roles?

First we did an informal diagnostic study and interviewed female staff. We wanted to get to know them better, and give them space to speak their mind. We wanted to understand their limiting beliefs; what prevented them from taking leaps forward at the company? We also wanted to hear what they thought we could do to facilitate their forward progress.

We took their feedback and created a program called [The Women in Leadership League](#), known as WILL. This was a mentoring and leadership program that would help more women move into leadership roles. The top leadership of the company--including the CEO--were assigned four to five female mentees. Their job was to support these women and help open doors for them. Through this program, female employees know that if they are having any difficulty, they can come back to their mentor--a senior leader--for guidance and support. We tell our mentees, "I will guide and support you and help you succeed. If you fail I am behind you and there is no issue; you can try something else." This type of mentoring and psychological support is critical.

Tata Power-DDL also established regular, informal opportunities for dialogue between female employees and the CEO. During these dialogues, the CEO shared his vision with female colleagues and encouraged women to take up more challenging roles at the utility. The informal dialogue provides an open forum for the women to express concerns or offer suggestions to improve the workplace. The group discusses each concern or suggestion and determines next steps to resolve the issue. The CEO receives regular updates on these actionable steps to ensure accountability and that women's voices are heard.

We also began exposing female staff to other female business leaders--particularly women leaders who came from basic or challenging backgrounds--who would inspire them. If you organize a training program for female employees where you have a man stand in front and tell them about their potential, that is just storytelling. But when successful women leaders share their stories, standing in front of them, they relate and feel more inspired. They are able to ask, "How did you do this? What was stopping you, and how did you overcome it?"

We also began providing female staff opportunities to travel around the country and even internationally, attending trainings and conferences, and speaking as panelists. We even created a special program to train female staff in public speaking to build their skills and confidence with public engagements.

Did the creation of a professional development program exclusively for women create any tension with men at the utility? Did men feel left out?

Initially, yes. There were issues from select segments of employees, and we dealt with those concerns as they came. But when your employees see that the top leadership of the company is investing in women, that the human resources function is supporting and behind these initiatives, that the company as a whole feels these initiatives are necessary, positive, and right, male employees start to buy-in. The programs and sessions we held with leadership on unconscious bias and gender diversity and inclusion were also helpful in mitigating any negative feelings.

What have been the positive impacts of investing in your female employees?

There have been many. Once we had established a supportive culture for women internally, we felt we now had a conducive environment to try more things. We felt that if we were going to truly promote gender diversity and inclusion, we should be putting more women out front. We thought, why not create a customer care center that is exclusively staffed and run by women? We started moving in that direction, staffing all of the positions at one of our customer care centers with women.

We spoke to the district office team which is responsible for managing the customer care center. We told the district manager, “You are now the primary person responsible for making these women comfortable, for mentoring them, for making sure they are receiving the training they need, and for ensuring that they have the infrastructure they need.” The district manager absorbed all of the responsibility for the performance of the center. We made it very clear: his success would be measured by the success of these women. When you make male managers and leaders responsible in this way, you motivate their participation and investment in their female colleagues. They will ensure their female colleagues succeed when it becomes a reflection on them. We took this responsibility all the way up to our senior leadership. The essence was: if these women fail it is not about them, it is about us.

Today the women-run customer service center is Tata Power-DDL’s top performing customer service center. When these women took over the center it was ranked seventh out of 12. Today it is ranked first. This increase in performance is a great business success. When the women took over the center, suddenly the number of incoming complaints was reduced. They started resolving cases faster. For me this was not a surprise; this reflects my personal experience working with my female colleagues. They solve problems faster. They are sincere, hardworking, talented, great at multitasking, and have a lot of patience. These attributes are what made the center a great success.



Women of Tata Power-DDL engage in dialogues with the CEO.

What does the future look like for women at Tata Power?

After we saw the great success of this customer care center, we opened another. It was also successful. Now our plan is to have all 12 customer service centers run by female employees. In total, that would create around 180 positions for women at the company. The success of these initiatives has only encouraged us to do much more. With support from our Engendering Utilities coach we are ensuring that our female staff have more learning and working opportunities through job rotations, and exposure to new areas. Today we have more women than ever before working in field roles, we have a female employee in the transformer maintenance station, and we plan to hire [more women into technical and operations positions](#).

If you could share one piece of advice with utility leaders from around the world, what would it be?

It is everyone's responsibility, and especially men's responsibility, to facilitate and support equal, fair, and empowering opportunities for women in industry. We should all join hands together to support this effort. When you look at utilities around the world, women are not there. We need to share our gender equality successes to showcase the positive outcomes of increasing gender equality to motivate others. We have demonstrated the business case and tremendous value of promoting women at Tata Power-DDL. Our Engendering Utilities coach gives us so much insight simply by asking questions. It is through the questioning and responding that our best ideas are generated. We are really grateful for the many insights that Engendering Utilities, Tetra Tech, and USAID have provided during this partnership.

ABOUT ENGENDERING UTILITIES

When women serve as leaders and employees, businesses benefit and company performance improves. USAID's Engendering Utilities program works with companies, organizations, and agencies around the world to increase women's participation in male-dominated industries. By introducing gender equality initiatives at each phase of the [employee life cycle](#), the program expands job opportunities for women while enhancing company performance. Recognizing that gender-equitable teams build better businesses, Tata Power-DDL partnered with [Engendering Utilities](#) to continue advancing gender equality across the organization. Engendering Utilities supports Tata Power by:

- **Providing a framework to implement gender equality interventions.** USAID's [Delivering Gender Equality: A Best Practices Framework for Male-Dominated Industries](#) provides partners with the resources they need to implement gender equality interventions across the employee life cycle.
- **Demand-driven change management coaching.** Tata Power-DDL receives expert change management and gender equality coaching and tailored technical support.
- **The Gender Equity Executive Leadership Program (GEELP).** Developed by USAID and Georgetown University McDonough School of Business, three Tata Power-DDL staff participated in this 12-month course which empowers employees to integrate gender equality initiatives within their organization's structure.

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