



ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE KENGEN, KENYA

USAID partners with KenGen to improve women’s participation in Kenya’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 [KenGen](#) to design workplace initiatives that will expand job opportunities for women and enhance the utility’s performance.

KenGen owns and operates 70 percent of Kenya’s power plants and is a leading energy company in East Africa.¹ In 2018 the utility earned the title “East Africa’s Best Sustainable Power Producer” for their focus on renewable energy, which accounts for 84 percent of the company’s power sources.² While only 24 percent of staff and one third of board members are women,³ KenGen made strides in 2017 when Rebecca Miano became the utility’s first female Chief Executive Officer⁴ and was recognized among the Top 100 Women CEOs in Africa.⁵

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

KENYA'S ENERGY SECTOR

Thirty years ago, only 40 percent of urban and zero percent of rural populations in Kenya had access to power. The country's middle class was growing, and demand for modern, affordable, and consistent energy was increasing. Recurrent drought and rising temperatures began impacting Kenya's ability to produce hydropower, and power outages and rolling blackouts were common. The country began diversifying its energy sources, generating power from geothermal, wind, biofuels, and solar, alongside hydropower and oil.⁶ These strategic investments paid off, and today over 80 percent of urban and 58 percent of rural populations have access to electricity.⁷

Kenya's energy sector continues to experience massive growth, and the industry is poised to become a key source of jobs over the course of the next decade as the country pursues universal electricity coverage.⁸ The country's state-run power utility employs 11,000 people and the growing renewable energy sector employs 10,000; numbers that are expected to grow by 70 percent in the next three years.⁹ In 2018 the government launched the "Electricity Sector Investment Prospectus," which anticipates \$15 billion of investment opportunities in Kenya's energy sector in the coming years.¹⁰

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

GENDER EQUALITY IN KENYA'S WORKFORCE

A complex web of contributing factors prevents women in Kenya from joining the formal workforce; particularly the male-dominated water, infrastructure, and energy sectors. These booming industries are a key growth area for Kenya, providing some of the country's most stable jobs.¹¹ The exclusion of women from opportunities in these markets deepens Kenya's gender equality divide.

Like many countries around the world, workforce inequities between Kenyan men and women begin in the education system. While girls and boys have similar rates of enrollment in primary and secondary school, few girls enroll in tertiary programs¹² and even fewer pursue STEM fields. Today less than 20 percent of graduates from engineering, manufacturing, or construction programs in Kenya are women.¹³

Harmful cultural practices and gender norms further impact a woman's ability to join the formal workforce. Kenyan women are responsible for most household tasks. One study found that women perform 78 hours of unpaid care work each week; nearly double that of men.¹⁴ When employment policies and practices are inflexible, women are unable to balance the responsibilities of work and home.

Violence against women in Kenya compounds these issues. Nearly half of Kenyan women have experienced physical or sexual violence,¹⁵ and 41 percent have experienced intimate partner violence.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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 KenGen—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 KENGEN

Engendering Utilities uses an [evidence-based methodology](#) to support women's participation in Kenya's energy sector. The program supports KenGen 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 KenGen 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 KenGen. 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 KenGen'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.

Engendering Utilities will support and accelerate gender equality initiatives already underway at KenGen as part of the broader strategic action plan, including:

- **Blue Power Network**, an initiative that engages men across the company to be champions for change and equality leaders.
- **Pink Energy**, a professional women's development network that connects women with opportunities across the organization.
- **Gender Mainstreaming Policy**, which expresses the utility's commitment to addressing gender inequality within the company, which requires alignment with Ministry of Energy Gender Mainstreaming Policy targets and development of a supportive strategic action plan.

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NOTES

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