



ENGENDERING UTILITIES PARTNER PROFILE OFOR, SENEGAL

USAID partners with Office des Forages Ruraux (OFOR) to improve women’s participation in Senegal’s 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 January 2020, USAID partnered with [OFOR](#) to design workplace initiatives that will expand job opportunities for women and enhance the utility’s performance.

Over the past 25 years the government of Senegal privatized state-owned water utilities in urban and rural areas. In 2014, Dakar-based OFOR assumed management of all rural water services, and began working with private companies—known as FERMIERS—to provide rural drinking water.¹ OFOR works alongside FERMIERS to restore infrastructure, evaluate financial needs, monitor operations, and use participatory, empowering, and inclusive approaches to support universal access to water across Senegal.²

OFOR’s corporate principles of inclusion extend to the company’s own business practices. Only a quarter of OFOR’s 70 employees are women; a statistic the company hopes to improve in the coming years.

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

SENEGAL'S WATER SECTOR

Senegal has a more developed water supply and sanitation system than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa,³ but significant gaps exist between urban and rural water access. While 80 percent of the population has access to basic water services⁴ and 50 percent has access to basic sanitation,⁵ only 20 percent has access to safe sanitation services.⁶

Access to water within households has grown significantly in Senegal. The household connection rate grew by over 30 percent between 1990 to 2015; the second highest growth rate in Sub-Saharan Africa, behind Botswana.⁷ Significant water-related concerns persist in the country, however. As temperatures increase and the climate becomes more variable, Senegal has seen an increase in drought. Three severe droughts over the course of the last decade⁸ have significantly increased urbanization in the country, and rural citizens continue to migrate to cities where the water supply is more reliable.⁹

Overexploitation and pollution of groundwater is a serious problem in Senegal. Groundwater used to supply the majority of the country's water; today it contributes to only five percent of Dakar's supply.¹⁰ Dakar receives most of its water from Lake Guiers, while the Senegal River provides most of the water in rural areas. The Government of Senegal passed the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) Act in 2014, which opened doors for increased investment in the water sector.¹¹ These partnerships are expected to improve access to water for Senegal's rural population.

Engendering Utilities' work with OFOR will ensure women can capitalize on growing opportunities in Senegal's water sector.

GENDER EQUALITY IN SENEGAL'S WORKFORCE

A complex web of contributing factors prevents women in Senegal from joining the formal workforce, particularly the male-dominated water sector. This industry represents a potential economic growth area in Senegal, and the exclusion of women from opportunities in this market deepens the country's gender equality divide.

Education in Senegal is expensive, and poor families often choose to keep boys in school while girls stay home to support household chores.¹² Only 14 percent of girls complete secondary school compared to 26 percent of boys, and only nine percent of girls enroll in tertiary level programs.¹³ Within tertiary level programs, less than 30 percent of girls choose to study science or technology related fields.¹⁴ Only 35 percent of Senegalese women participate in the workforce,¹⁵ primarily in the service sector.¹⁶ Over 70 percent of women are engaged in vulnerable employment,¹⁷ and men earn 116 percent more than women.¹⁸

Harmful cultural practices and gender norms further impact a woman's ability to advance in the workforce. Early marriage is common in Senegal, which disrupts education and workforce participation. Thirty percent of women in Senegal are married by age 18,¹⁹ and eight percent are based violence compounds these issues, and 30 percent of women in Senegal have experienced physical or sexual violence.²¹ Domestic violence cases are rarely reported or tried in court,²² and 46 percent of women surveyed in Senegal believe a husband is justified for beating his wife.²³ 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.²⁴ 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 OFOR—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 OFOR

Engendering Utilities uses an [evidence-based methodology](#) to support women’s participation in Senegal’s water sector. The program supports OFOR 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 OFOR 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 OFOR. 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 OFOR’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. These strategies will support OFOR in its goal of achieving gender equality in its workforce, in line with national gender strategies that aim to achieve parity in leadership and governance of Senegalese public agencies.

Organizational readiness for change is in place at OFOR, and senior leadership has expressed commitment to:

- **Creating and Operationalizing a Gender Strategy** that aligns with the Government of Senegal’s gender strategy.
- **Placing Women in Leadership**, as only six of the 29 employees in managerial roles at the company are women.
- **Collecting Sex-Disaggregated Data**, as the company does not currently collect this information for programmatic or HR-related reporting.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Senior Amanda Valenta
Energy Specialist
Office of Energy and
Infrastructure, USAID
avalenta@usaid.gov

Corinne Hart
Senior Advisor for
Gender and Environment
Office of Gender Equality and
Women’s Empowerment
USAID, cohart@usaid.gov

Jessica Menon
Gender Advisor
Tetra Tech
jessica.menon@tetrattech.com

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NOTES

¹ OFOR. Our Mission. Retrieved from: <http://www.forages-ruraux.sn/qui-sommes-nous/nos-missions>

² Ibid

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¹⁵ International Labor Organization. (2017). ILOSTAT database. Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.ISV.IFRM.ZS?locations=SN>

¹⁶ International Labor Organization. (2017). ILOSTAT database.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ GenderGap.AFRICA. Retrieved from: <https://gendergap.africa/>

¹⁹ Demographic and Health Surveys. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.M18.2024.FE.ZS?locations=SN>

²⁰ Demographic and Health Surveys. (2017). Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.M15.2024.FE.ZS?locations=SN>

²¹ USAID. IDEA Country Dashboard. Retrieved from: <https://idea.usaid.gov/cd/senegal/gender>

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