



EKO ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION PLC (EKEDC) NIGERIA

DESIGN &
MANUFACTURE
OF INDUSTRIAL
PRODUCTS

ENERGY
INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT

GENERATION,
TRANSMISSION,
STORAGE,
TRANSPORTATION

DISTRIBUTION

Eko Electricity Distribution PLC (EKEDC) came into existence when Nigeria's power sector was unbundled and privatized in 2013. An offshoot of the legacy government utility NEPA, the company is one of the largest among the 11 electricity distribution companies serving the country today.



Presentation on STEM at high schools. Photo credit: EKEDC.

SUMMARY

YEAR ESTABLISHED: 2013

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 1,835

Female employees: 369 / 1,838 (20.1%) (Share of women in organization in 2013: approximately 15%)

Women comprise 38% of management

Women comprise 2% of engineering positions

COUNTRIES OF OPERATION: Nigeria

AREAS OF VALUE CHAIN & GENDER OPPORTUNITIES INTEGRATED:

Senior Management/Employees

- ☐ Have a company commitment & plan for gender diversity, including targets and measurement systems
- ☐ Provide internship opportunities linked to possible employment opportunities to high-potential young female engineers and technicians
- ☐ Remove bias from job descriptions and modify certain industry terms to be more inclusive (e.g., line-men to lineworkers)
- ☐ Use behavioral-based interviewing for job candidates and emphasize hiring on demonstrated competencies (decisions thus made on assessments, rather than assumptions)
- ☐ Provide training, workshops and education for female and male employees, onsite and through partners
- ☐ Create pipeline opportunities and promote from within.
- ☐ Highlight existing employees in traditionally male-dominated roles (serving as role models)
- ☐ Collect sex-disaggregated HR data
- ☐ Enact a whistleblower policy
- ☐ Implement a transparent reporting process for violations including sexual harassment
- ☐ Have a paid maternity leave policy and a paid paternity leave policy
- ☐ Provide sick leave and health care benefits

Community

- ☐ Conduct outreach and activities to stimulate interest in STEM among girls.

BUSINESS IMPACTS:

- ☐ Larger and more diverse pool of skilled staff to strengthen the restructured company in its ongoing transition.
- ☐ Reduced gender bias in hiring and promotion enables EKEDC to identify best candidates for positions.
- ☐ Public recognition and enhanced brand reputation.
- ☐ Increased employee satisfaction fosters mutual loyalty between employees and the company.

SOCIAL IMPACTS:

- ☐ Safe, dignified workplace enhances the morale and quality of life for women and men at EKEDC.
- ☐ Women joining technical and lineworker positions serve as role models for other women .
- ☐ More girls encouraged to pursue STEM, shifting gender norms around careers for women and men.

BACKGROUND ON GENDER STRATEGY

Organizational culture and change management are important for EKEDC because of the sector reforms that took place in its recent history. The company retained a large share of its staff from the former government utility, and yet created a new company with a vision of efficiency and competitive growth. EKEDC retained a number of the original employees to capture their vast knowledge and skill base, while complementing this decision with the strategy of injecting new talent into the company. The company's analytics showed an aging workforce, where 68% was over 40 years old. While EKEDC has further reduced its workforce since it was established in 2013, this challenging transition has created a window for the active construction of a more diverse and inclusive organization as it is restructured. An important gender opportunity has also emerged with the occasion to facilitate knowledge transfer to female employees, as EKEDC prepares for wide succession planning in the decade to come. Yet as in many countries, Nigeria's power sector has historically been dominated by men across the energy value chain.

To address such gender disparities and improve business performance in power companies, USAID began a program with seven companies in five countries called Engendering Utilities, which

EKEDC joined in 2015. As part of its baseline research, the program found that – like most other participating utilities – women's participation at EKEDC was very minimal: less than one in five employees (19%) were female, with particularly low representation in technical roles. Just 3.3% of engineers in the company were women. The company found that most of its core technical functions skewed male-dominated, such as those in Power Procurement; Operations and Maintenance; Health, Safety and Environment; Commercial; and Technical Services. A male majority was also evident in all core support (i.e., non-technical) functions at EKEDC, except in Human Resources (HR), Legal, and Finance. Of the 360 women employed by EKEDC in 2015, 142 were concentrated in these three departments.

To address these imbalances and capitalize on the gains of a diverse workforce, the participating utility companies began integrating gender in various points. Strategies under Engendering Utilities were primarily across the HR lifecycle, aiming to increase women's representation in technical roles and leadership positions. EKEDC has also purposefully taken an inclusive approach in its community outreach, which feeds back into its longer-term interest in diversifying the pipeline of human capital in the power sector.

GENDER OPPORTUNITIES IMPLEMENTED & RESULTS

Community members:

The power sector is faced with the challenge of attracting and retaining sufficient talent, especially for roles such as electrical engineers and field tech-

nicians. Recognizing the potential of the "diversity dividend" to build a more sustainable and diverse pool of talent in the power sector, EKEDC conducts activities to stimulate interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) among girls and young women in the community, who

experience greater structural and social barriers to entering a career in STEM-related fields than their male counterparts.

The challenges facing the power sector need to be tackled by the best and brightest minds; yet some of those minds are being discouraged from pursuing a career in engineering.

—AIK ALENKHE, CHIEF HR OFFICER AT EKEDC

The company's gender-smart community efforts include school outreach to engage female students in energy-related courses. An Energy Club was launched in 3 junior and senior secondary schools in Lagos, Nigeria. A number of girls who exhibited no interest in engineering or science subjects prior to joining the club reportedly developed interest over time, demonstrating greater awareness of careers within distribution companies and more knowledge of the power sector in general. To promote interest in STEM-related subject in a greater diversity of primary-age children, an additional STEM Outreach Day engaged 50 students (38 girls and 12 boys) selected from 10 public schools in June 2018. EKEDC also conducted a Bring Your Daughter to Work Day onsite, during which 35 girls were exposed to what a career with an electricity utility can look like. Outreach activities at vocational schools and universities also raise awareness of EKEDC as an equal opportunity employer and generate interest in power sector internships among a new generation of women and men.

Owing to the success and visibility of its commu-

nity initiatives, EKEDC was recognized at a 2016 Conference hosted by Voice of Women radio (VOW 91.7 FM) as the Best Gender Empowering Company and a "voice for women." Such activities can therefore earn the utility recognition and impact its reputation, while meeting corporate social responsibility objectives, and contributing to the future power sector talent pipeline by stimulating STEM curiosity in girls earlier.

Employees:

EKEDC is also integrating a gender lens in its workforce, taking steps towards diversity and inclusion during the recruitment processes, as well as practicing equity in the development and promotion of existing staff.

We have expunged exclusive language like "linemen" from our workplace. Even the "Office of Manpower" we have now named the 'Office of Workforce Planning.'

—AIK ALENKHE


In some instances, company-wide nomenclature firstly needed to be changed to accommodate and encourage diversity. Through intentional communications and sensitization from the top, EKEDC has modified certain industry terms to be more inclusive, for example by renaming linemen to be lineworkers. EKEDC also intends to embed short videos of female employees in its website to inspire prospective female candidates to pursue potential career paths in engineering and other traditionally male functions in the power sector.

As part of its Female Lineworker Initiative, EKEDC has proactively partnered with the National Power Training Institute (NAPTIN), the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), and other government technical schools and recruitment agencies to match female electricians and engineers to the company for internships and potential employment opportunities. Leading this collaborative effort to encourage gender diversity and increase the number of women in the field, EKEDC has so far recruited four of the “best female graduates” under the program. The candidates are not selected on the basis of being female and must pass the same competency tests as male recruits. The difference is that through such initiatives, more women are applying who might not otherwise have demonstrated interest.

The utility is promoting equity by implementing gender equitable hiring and promotion processes and succession planning. In hiring and promotion, these include the use of behavioral-based interviewing of job candidates and hiring practices based on demonstrated competencies, which enable EKEDC to identify the best candidates for

different positions. Decisions are based on assessments rather than assumptions, and panels are discouraged from asking any questions of interviewees beyond the range of skills required for the job. Since questions like “Will you work late hours?” and “Do you plan to have more children?” are not related to the job’s competencies, they often serve to intimidate or exclude women during hiring interviews. Basing the vetting on validated competencies can reduce forthright discrimination against women in the sector and reduce opportunities for unconscious bias to influence managerial decisions.

To ensure they meet their diversity goals, the company has set gender targets for new hires in engineering roles. For example in 2018, management decided that once a roster of qualified candidates is compiled, 45% of the 65 engineers to be hired by the end of the year should be women. Pending the upgrade of local power facilities, EKEDC further intends to hire female distribution substation officers to work day shifts.



Our female lineworkers were subjected to the same competency test as male candidates. They met the clearly defined metrics to do the job in terms of ability and agility. Lineworkers deal with field technical issues like disconnecting nonpaying customers or clearing technical faults, so they must have the ability to climb ladders. While many believed that only men were capable of performing these tasks, under my watch that idea has change.



—AIK ALENKHE



Internal development and promotion also enables the company to retain and maximize female talent. Equitable professional development opportunities encourage staff in all levels and areas to strive for promotion. Through a variety of employee trainings, workshops and educational opportunities, women and men are enhancing hard and soft skills needed to advance professionally.

EKEDC has kept equity in mind when affording its staff such opportunities. For example, when a partnership with African Power Sector Utilities offered employees fresh training in energy-related courses (e.g., maintenance of transformers and switch gears, health and safety, customer service, operational policy), EKEDC received 150 internal applications for 50 slots. While most were submitted by men, the company selected 31 women (62%) to participate in the unique opportunity alongside other utility employees in the region. By integrating a gender lens when administering such partnerships with power sector training institutes, EKEDC significantly expanded women's access (from 69 to 467 women, a 577% increase) to professional development programs, resulting in a large and diversified pool of skilled staff to strengthen the company in its ongoing transition.

The recently concluded Eko Distribution Training Program, which attracted about 13,000 (majority-male) applicants, was another avenue to induct more females into the industry. EKEDC shortlisted 100 candidates, of whom 72 were male and 28 female (17 engineers and 11 non-engineers).

The training program was designed to develop a workforce of homegrown talents and leaders that will drive EKEDC's ongoing transformation agenda to become the leading customer-centric utility in Africa.

From 2017-2018, the Chief HR Officer and two other EKEDC management staff participated in a 10-month Gender Equity Executive Leadership Course through Georgetown University and USAID. The team's Capstone Project centers on gender equitable succession planning, now underway, which involves design and implementation of development plans for high-potential women to access training programs, coaching, and formal mentorship. With a growing focus on gender equity in access to these professional opportunities, senior leadership has managed to widen the pool of high potential female successors for key positions in the company. As of September 2018, 21 out of 97 likely successors were women.

Institutional environment can greatly influence whether talented women and men stay with an organization. Hence creating equitable and "employee friendly" conditions in the workplace has emerged as a top priority for the company. EKEDC recognized early on the need to ensure a workplace that is ethical and safe for all its people.

The company maintains an ethics committee to hear grievances in violation of the clearly defined equal opportunity policy or the zero-tolerance policy on extorting. Further organizational improvements include new HR policies addressing sexual harassment. EKEDC has successfully deployed a company-wide whistle blowing policy that utilizes email, hotlines, and an online portal to receive anonymous tips, and ensures full protection to staff who are deployed in the field. Regarding gender integration on health and environment issues, Chief HR Officer Aik Alenkehe acknowledges, “We are still overhauling some things, but we are getting there. For example, we started to build female toilets, so our facilities are sensitive to our genders, but we don’t have that luxury yet in some of our locations.”

The utility also offers a range of benefits to promote work-life balance that include: annual paid time off (25 days), casual leave (5 days), paid maternity (3 months) and paternity (5 days) leave,

wedding anniversary leave (1 day), working breaks for religious observations, family and medical leave, health coverage for staff and dependents, an onsite medical facility at headquarters, stress management and wellness programs, and staff re-deployment to offices near their residential area. Such benefits accommodate workers’ full range of needs, in particular women and men who balance caretaking roles outside of work and can foster mutual loyalty in employees and their organizations.

New HR compliance processes have also been developed since partnering with Engendering Utilities, including the mandate to disaggregate HR data by sex, use findings to inform company analysis, and make this data available to stakeholders. With richer data on women’s and men’s participation in the company, EKEDC can make more informed business decisions based on emerging opportunities to integrate a gender lens in both its technical and support operations.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. Efforts to highlight female role models in traditionally male-dominated departments and positions can encourage other women to enter such careers.
2. Given the relative lack of women applying to engineering positions, it is important to think longer term and engage girls in STEM education and experience, which can further enhance a company’s reputation.
3. Given that fewer women apply to management positions, promoting from within and nurturing high-potential female employees is critical in reaching gender equity in managerial roles and taking advantage of the diversity dividend.
4. Bias can be subtly reinforced through language (e.g., linemen, manpower). Adjusting workplace terms to be gender-neutral is important for ensuring a more inclusive organization.
5. Rather than emphasizing a new initiative as a women’s program, rolling out gender equitable HR policies and work-life balance programs as “inclusive” and “employee-friendly” practices can improve their uptake by all staff.

IMPACTS:

Business impacts:

- Competency-based processes for hiring and promotion reduce gender bias and enable EKEDC to identify the best candidates for different positions.
- Equitable professional development opportunities encourage women and men to strive for promotion, benefitting the company through retaining and maximizing female talent.
- Through subsidized partnerships with national professional institutes, EKEDC significantly expanded women's access to training programs offered through the company (from 69 to 467 women, a 577% increase), resulting in a large and diversified pool of skilled staff to serve and strengthen the company in its ongoing transition.
- Public recognition as “gender empowering” employer leads to enhanced brand reputation for EKEDC.
- Work-life balance initiatives recognize women's and men's external interests and needs,

increasing employee satisfaction and fostering employee loyalty.

Social impacts:

- Safe, dignified workplaces like EKEDC build employee morale, improving job satisfaction and quality of life for women and men.
- Women joining technical and lineworker positions serve as role models for other women to enter the sector.
- More girls are encouraged to pursue STEM-related careers through EKEDC's community outreach.

Organizational impacts:

- Greater gender sensitivity in language and processes is opening EKEDC's door as a welcoming workplace for women.
- Gender balance in EKEDC's workforce has improved by approximately 6% in the 5 years since EKEDC was established, in some instances with women joining technical and lineworker positions. This is prompting a gradual shift in gender norms around “appropriate” roles for women and men.

This case study was developed through (1) a review of EKEDC program documentation from the Engendering Utilities program of USAID, and (2) a key informant interview conducted with Aik Alenkhe, Chief Human Resource Officer at EKEDC headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria.

