

The Women in Energy series is a joint project between USEA and USAID that was developed out of USEA's Engendering Utilities Partnership, a program funded by USAID to improve gender policies and gender outcomes at their respective organizations.



Every month we feature a woman who has shown exemplary leadership. We want to showcase your story this month. The women among you come from diverse backgrounds and roles, and they bring with them a unique perspective to gender equality within the energy sector.

Women in Energy Interview Questions

1. How have your education and career path led you to where you are now?

I'm the only daughter among 3 siblings, my parents come from a traditional family, in my family I was the person who brought the idea of equality and what we were given was the result of effort and struggle, not for being male or female. I loved to design clothes, that was my passion as a child, but in El Salvador there were no design studios at that time (90s), so I became interested in architecture, and with that I worked hard on developing my creativity and the resolution of spatial problems. My first and only job has been in LAGEO, I joined the company 21 years ago, and since the first day I have been able to learn about each geothermal process, I have lived in the geothermal fields of El Salvador, and I have been present in the geothermal development of my country since 1998. I never said "I can't do that job", that doesn't mean I never felt fear, fear is normal when something is new, but I learn to see every problem as a challenge and my profession helped me to apply creativity to solve all the challenges that I went through. In LAGEO I have been trained in many areas: geothermal, social, environmental, administrative, etc., and one of the main pillars in which I have always supported myself in my work is GOD, and now that I am in engineering management leading a group of excellent professionals, I continue to learn, and although my passion as a child and my university studies were not initially synchronized with geothermal energy, LIFE brought me here, and the passion I put into things made me love my work and leave the best of me in every design, in every construction, in every decision and in what I do in the geothermal industry.

2. Over the course of your career, have you witnessed changes in the sector that have launched more women into leadership positions?

Definitely yes, and I am an example of that.

I reflect on the issue of equality, and I think that since a girl decides to study a university degree, at least in my country there is a cultural influence that some careers are for men, as an influence it does not allow more women to exist in the scientific and technical fields, leaving less professional women for Geothermal Energy, however this is changing, and an example of this is the participation of more professional women in the geothermal graduates that are taught at LAGEO every year, young people from Latin America are chosen to train in geothermal for 6 months, this program supported by the Icelandic government, has allowed many women to train and return to their countries with a specialty in geothermal energy, and be future leaders in their companies.

... and we can go further, and reflect that being a leader is not synonymous with having a high position, you can also be a leader of a group of working women, and in this sense in LAGEO geothermal plants I have witnessed the increase of women in jobs that men traditionally did, I have seen women working in the major maintenance of the condensation units, women working 10 or 15 meters high in a cooling tower, or women working in the maintenance of a geothermal turbine. This is changing, and the WING project (Women in Geothermal) has helped us a lot to introduce the subject, to raise awareness, to spread our wings and fly.

3. Technology is transforming the traditional utility business model into a more modern interactive grid. Some utilities view this transformation as an opportunity to focus on change management and diversity. Research provides compelling evidence that inclusion and diversity unlock innovation and drives better business performance. What, if anything, is your organization doing to attract, retain, and promote more women into senior management positions to respond to the dramatic industry transformation?

LAGEO is known as a reference in the region in the geothermal issue, with experience in geothermal energy that dates back to the 1960s, LAGEO has encouraged many women in these years for training and in important positions within the company. Many women who have such a great experience in geothermal energy were benefited with training abroad, there is a training program that will allow more women to be trained in different areas, and on the other hand, there has been training directed to women in the past six months in the Geothermal fields where they were taught about gender equality, leadership, entrepreneurship, sorority, emotional intelligence, among other topics. In the last 3 months of the year 2019 in LAGEO a considerable number of women have been recruited for different areas, managing to move from 23% to 25% of women's participation within the company, this is due to the leadership and vision of the presidency of the company and, in general, government support at the national level so that more women participate in strategic positions.

4. Are talented women within your organization making it to top leadership positions? Why/why not?

No woman has reached a first line management position yet, but there are women that have leadership positions in the company and it's not only me, in other areas as the administrative and laboratory there are woman in leadership positions, we are overcoming this barrier, and we have to believe in ourselves and endure in order to get to the goal.

5. Companies that embrace diversity outperform their competitors. What type of diversity programs does your organization have in place to mentor future women leaders? How does your organization measure and report gender diversity? Is the data publicly available?

One of the latest programs is the development of the WINGman Special Taskforce workshop, where the team consisting of LAGEO, WING global, World Bank and GIZ (German international cooperation agency) imparted knowledge on the subject and the aim of the WST is to provide the means to affect change of the gender status quo inside geothermal organizations. Through challenging the harmful, traditional perception of male and female roles, the WST aims to eliminate gender stereotypes and encourages men to be role models, champions, and advocates of gender equality. In this way WST trained the future trainers, in this way LAGEO ratifies its commitment to gender equality and in the future the benefits of this program will be published.

6. What actions should the energy and electricity sector be focused on to accelerate change, increase diversity, and foster a better gender balance in the boardroom?

Focusing on the identification of women leaders, making their work known, a team of women at the level of America should be formed to inspire others, that their task is to "motivate others" to believe in themselves, to train more to overcome the fear of new challenges. Implement the idea within this industry that if there is still a company that does not have gender equality as a strategic issue, it is a company that will tend to be extinguished sooner or later, that this issue is present in all agendas of energy meetings at the level worldwide, and that related international organizations (cooperation agencies, financial agencies, programs, etc.) have gender equality and diversity in their requirements.