

GENDER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

A CASE STUDY

PHP ENERGY

A gender smart community engagement strategy reduces operational risk for renewable energy projects while expanding equitable impact in the communities of influence.

AT A GLANCE



100%

Of management team trained on gender smart business practices in the renewable energy sector



117

Households surveyed in a gender-focused socioeconomic assessment



10

Women entrepreneurs trained in a dynamic workshop on self-esteem, leadership, and empowerment



"The data about gender inequality is mind-blowing. We are committing ourselves to these actions, and I feel encouraged to generate a more equitable culture, and seek more learning opportunities..."

Finance Director, PHP Energy



PHP Energy, Community entrepreneurs 2021.

OBJECTIVES

Raise awareness about the relevant gender considerations throughout a renewable energy project lifecycle and lead the team in the design and implementation of a gender-focused community engagement strategy to improve the project's reputation and reduce potential for conflict in the community, which in turn mitigates operational risks and maximizes impact on women and girls.

SOLUTIONS

Provide tailored technical assistance with the following reinforcing components: 1) Training focused on gender awareness and best practices in the renewable energy sector; 2) A community socioeconomic field study; 3) Workshops to empower women entrepreneurs; and 4) The development of a gender-focused community engagement strategy and action plan.

RESULTS

Gender awareness and knowledge

Strengthened capacity to integrate gender considerations throughout the renewable energy project lifecycle through greater awareness and knowledge.

Gender-focused community engagement

Development and ongoing implementation of a community engagement strategy to promote the growth of the local economy through direct support to women entrepreneurs.

Dedicated resources

Hired a new full-time employee that is leading and managing community engagement strategy and activities with a gender lens.





Ilu Women's Empowerment Program

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Today, it is abundantly clear that advancing gender equality is both good for business and good for the world, as proven by a wide and growing set of evidence demonstrating that:

- Female entrepreneurs deliver higher returns for investors.¹
- Diversity drives improved profitability, innovation, decision-making, and employee satisfaction and retention.²
- Women's purchasing power is growing rapidly and represents a growth market larger than China and India combined.³

Yet, a significant gender gap persists today across business activities, sectors, and countries that is preventing businesses, economies, and nations from realizing the outsized benefits of gender equality. To address that opportunity, gender lens investing is increasingly recognized as a powerful vehicle of change within companies and society at large.

Deetken Impact is a Canadian asset manager that invests throughout a variety of sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean with a focus on women's empowerment and sustainable energy. Deetken Impact, in partnership with **Pro Mujer**, a leading provider of vital services to low-income women, launched and manage the Ilu Women's Empowerment Fund to advance gender equality in the region.

With the support of **The U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID)** Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Hub program, the Ilu Fund developed the Ilu Women's Empowerment Program to promote gender equality in Latin America through three main components:

Incremental Capital	Technical Assistance	Knowledge Dissemination and Advocacy
Expanding the Ilu Fund with risk-adjusted blended finance capital.	Engaging directly with 15 portfolio companies in customized projects to develop and strengthen gender smart business practices.	Developing an open-source toolkit, hosting regional workshops, leading investor education events, and sharing case studies.

¹ Katie Abouzahr, "Why Women-Owned Start-ups Are a Better Bet," BCG, June 6, 2018, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/why-women-owned-startups-are-better-bet>.

² Vivan Hunt, Dennis Layton, and Sara Prince, "Why Diversity Matters," McKinsey & Company, January 1, 2015, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>.

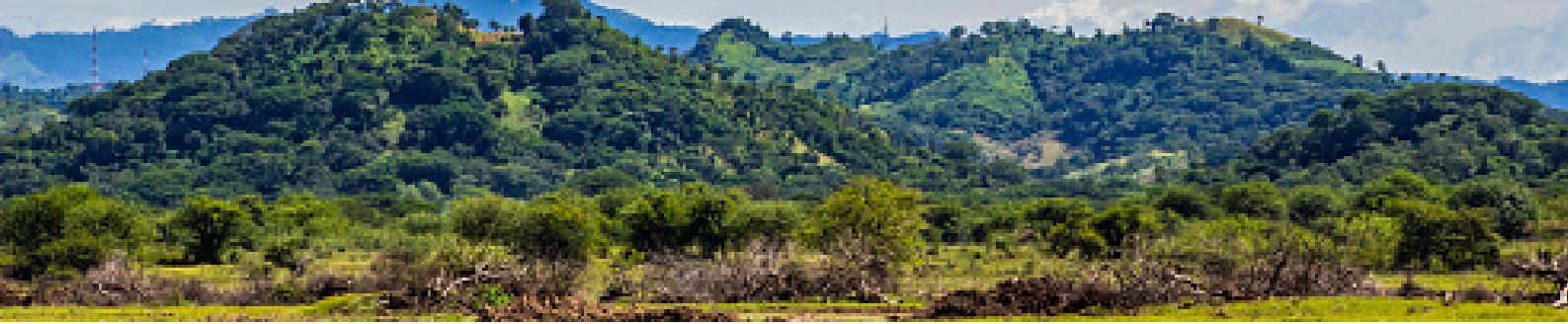
³ Michael J. Silverstein and Kate Sayre, "The Female Economy," Harvard Business Review, September 2009, <https://hbr.org/2009/09/the-female-economy>.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

By improving gender practices, companies experience greater business performance and investability, more balanced decision-making, reduced business risk, and gains in gender equality in the communities in which they operate. Each technical assistance project was customized to the needs and priorities of the organization, in alignment with one of five project streams.

PROJECT STREAM	OBJECTIVES
01 Inclusive Governance	Equip companies to build and maintain diverse and inclusive governance through education at the Board of Directors level and the implementation of inclusive policies and procedures.
02 Women in Leadership	Foster internal promotion and leadership of women employees through leadership coaching for women employees, diversity, inclusion, and equity education for management, and the strengthening of equitable talent management processes.
03 Gender Smart Information Systems	Enable companies to better understand the gender-relevant aspects of the business by improving the institution's data collection, management, and analysis with a gender lens to inform decision making.
04 Gender Smart Products, Services, and Marketing	Ready companies to design and market products and services specifically for women clients, through education and capacity building on gender smart commercial and marketing strategies.
05 Gender Sensitive Community Engagement	Embed gender considerations into relevant aspects of project design, execution, and management, such as governance, workplace equity, labor practices, and social or environmental initiatives in the communities of influence.

Each project spanned a 12 - 16 week period during which the Ilu Fund actively engaged with company personnel on a weekly basis. The program was resourced with Ilu Fund staff (Deetken Impact and Pro Mujer personnel) with support from subject matter experts based in Latin America who contributed to the design of each project stream and had focused roles in implementation of project activities. This case study is intended for readers to understand the impacts of gender smart technical assistance in practice and how the programs implemented address and advance gender practices.



PHP Energy

GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

El Nispero II, a project owned and operated by **PHP Energy**, is a hydroelectric project with 6 MW capacity located in Honduras in the northwest department of Santa Barbara. The project was built in 2018 as an addition to El Nispero I, a 22 MW hydroelectric project built in 1982 by La Empresa Nacional de Energía Eléctrica (ENEE), the state-owned utility of Honduras. This second phase of the project supports 12 jobs on an ongoing basis. The energy generated is sold directly to the ENEE, which then distributes it throughout the country. The project generates enough clean **energy to power more than 8,000 households while displacing nearly 12,000 tons of greenhouse gases (GHGs), equivalent to taking approximately 2,500 cars off the road.**

PHP Energy, a private consortium of 14 individuals and groups, owns 70% of El Nispero II, with the remaining 30% owned by ENEE. PHP Energy is focused on electricity generation and the team had little to no awareness of gender smart business practices or the importance of considering gender in project design and development. Despite leading several social and environmental initiatives since project inception, the team lacked a defined and intentional strategy for community engagement that considers gender impacts.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GENDERED ISSUE

Climate change and gender inequality are two of the most pressing issues of our time, but often addressed independently by energy and gender leaders alike. And yet, it has become increasingly clear that integrating a gender perspective into renewable energy projects not only accelerates social and environmental impact in communities of influence, but it also drives financial sustainability, increased investability, balanced decision-making, and operational risk reduction.⁴

Today, the sector faces widespread gender disparities. For instance, it is estimated that women hold only 32% of jobs, and tend to be overrepresented in administrative and non-technical positions that also pay lower wages.⁵ Additionally, women in the communities of influence are often excluded from project design and development, which means they may end up further disadvantaged by the project.



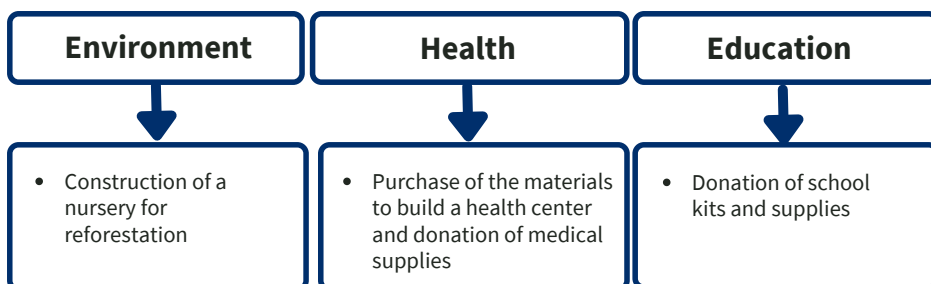
El Nispero, Santa Bárbara, Honduras, 2021.

Gender smart energy solutions ensure the inclusion of women throughout all stages of the project lifecycle, as leaders, employees, customers, suppliers, and, importantly, as community members. For instance, gender-sensitive community engagement seeks the participation of women in community consultations during project design, as well as the development of community initiatives that impact women and girls. This not only ensures project benefits are optimized and equitable, but also reduces the risk of community unrest that can interrupt operations. The PHP Energy team recognized the importance of the community to their project and identified an opportunity to engage with women directly in social initiatives.

⁴ Biegel, Suzanne and Lambin, Sophie, "Gender & Climate Investment: A strategy for unlocking a sustainable future," Gender Smart, February, 2021, <https://www.gendersmartinvesting.com/resource-library/2021/2/3/gender-amp-climate-investment-a-strategy-for-unlocking-a-sustainable-future-fgcm1>.
⁵ IRENA (2019). "Renewable Energy: A Gender Perspective".

PHP ENERGY'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Since project inception, the PHP Energy team has made direct contributions to the community, choosing to focus on three thematic areas, and have since executed isolated activities in each:



Given their commitment to the community, the Ilu Fund identified a tremendous opportunity to work with the PHP Energy team to bring a gender lens to community engagement, subsequently opening the road for similar renewable energy companies, developers, and project sponsors to follow their steps in the future.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND FINDINGS

Harnessing the team's interest in promoting sustainable economic development in the community, the Ilu Fund team designed a program to engage with women entrepreneurs, while also initiating a holistic gender mainstreaming movement throughout the business in a multi-faceted approach:



1

ASSESSMENT

Through a complete document review and in-depth interviews with key project stakeholders, the Ilu Fund team identified the following findings:



Entrepreneur, El Nispero, 2021.

01

Team members had **little to no gender awareness** and lacked a strategic approach that considers relevant gender aspects of the project.

02

There was no **defined strategy for community engagement**, and as a result, the team often executed one-off activities, resulting in an inefficient use of resources and limited impact.

03

There was no **gender focus or perspective integrated in community engagement activities**.

04

There was a **lack of current demographic and socioeconomic information about the community** in which the project is located (El Nispero, Santa Bárbara), which limits their understanding of how to best support them.

2

TRAINING

A three-hour team training was conducted for the entire PHP Energy management team, in which team members learned about fundamental gender concepts and the many ways to integrate a gender perspective throughout the renewable energy project lifecycle by analyzing a real-life case of a gender program to identify learnings to apply to their own project.



El Nispero, 2021.

3

SOCIOCULTURAL FIELD STUDY

The Ilu Fund team executed a complete and in-depth sociocultural assessment and field study of the El Nispero, Santa Bárbara community through the following activities:



117

Households surveyed



421

People reached



15

In-depth interviews with key stakeholders



Ethnographic observation through community visits

The sociocultural field study and assessment reflected the following insights:

62%

of the population of El Nispero lives on a household income of less than 1,000 Lempiras (\$40 USD) per month.

75%

of survey respondents did not identify any project carried out in their community, nor did they indicate institutions involved.

22%

of survey respondents indicated that they have "an idea" of what the PHP Energy does. Broadly speaking, people associate the project with the ENEE, which has a poor reputation within the community and nationwide due to service interruptions, price increases, and low coverage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the field study and team training, the following key recommendations were provided to the team:

1

Develop a **strategic communications plan** that fosters awareness and transparency about the initiatives PHP Energy supports, and therefore strengthens PHP Energy's reputation amongst community members. Particularly, establish new and direct communication channels with community actors, such as gender-focused community groups, associations, and non-profits.

2

Dedicate resources to community engagement, both in terms of financial contributions and personnel. Ensure that team members involved in community activities are trained in gender-sensitive and inclusive engagement.

3

Identify and support groups of women entrepreneurs in the community to promote equitable economic growth, fostering new ties with women leaders and their participation in community initiatives.

4

Partner with other entities and organized groups that work in the region, especially those with a focus on women's empowerment, combining resources and expertise to maximize impact.

4

A WORKSHOP FOR GROUPS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

The Ilu Fund team led an in-person workshop with 10 women entrepreneurs from the surrounding communities. The objective of the session was to raise awareness of gender gaps and challenges faced in their communities and businesses, and empower them as entrepreneurs to promote business growth, in addition to establishing direct connection with PHP Energy to pave the way for future support.

Although many identified as having participated in training sessions with different institutions over the years, the women consistently noted that these programs fell short. In particular, they noted the lack of follow-up and ongoing accompaniment, as well as what was perceived as unfulfilled promises (for example, financing).



Workshop with women entrepreneurs, 2021.

5

IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH-POTENTIAL GROUPS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Based on observations in the workshop and the community assessment, two high-potential organized groups of women entrepreneurs were identified as recipients of support from the PHP Energy team going forward.

Entrepreneur Group 1

Product/service: roasted and packaged coffee

Year of start of operations: 2013

of female partners: 13 women

Opportunity: It is the only group in the community that sells coffee, and they have an existing portfolio of satisfied clients.

Entrepreneur Group 2

Product/service: homemade bread

Year of start of operations: 2000

of female partners: 40 women

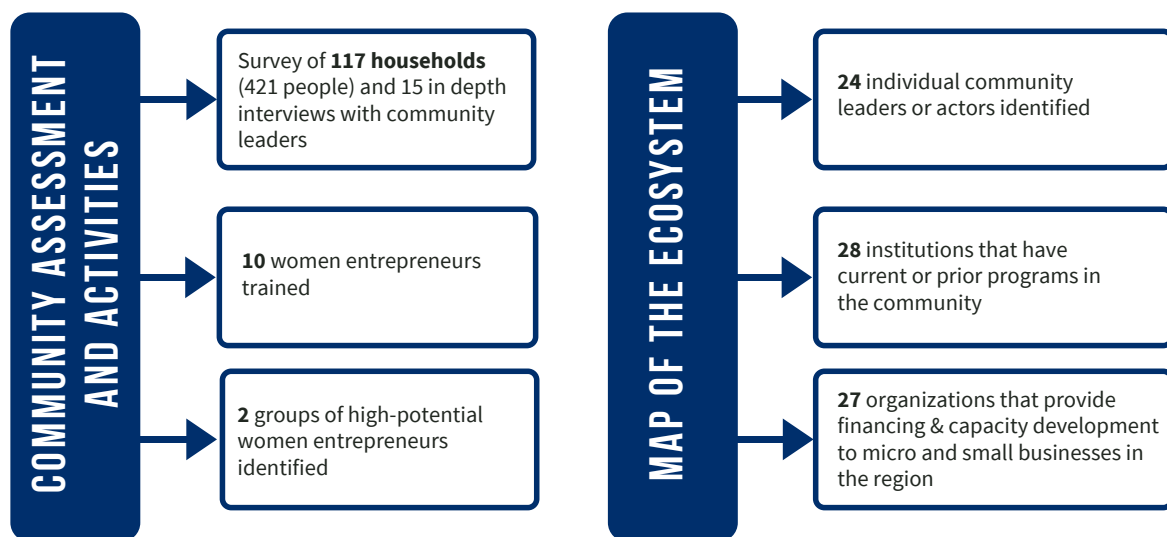
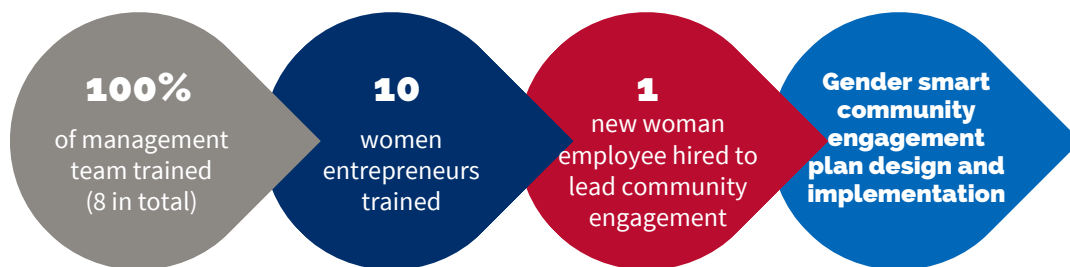
Opportunity: This group has not had access to training and support from other organizations as they are located in a very rural community outside of the main village, and showed great enthusiasm to participate in a program.

6

ACTION PLAN

Three one-hour action plan sessions were carried out in order to put recommendations into action over the next six months, identifying specific objectives, activities to achieve those objectives, responsibilities, and timelines. This included identification of partnerships from a diverse set of actors, institutions, and organized groups in the community were identified in the field study, enabling the PHP Energy team to complement efforts with the expertise, presence, and resources of others to deepen their impact and broaden their reach.

PROJECT OUTPUTS



“One never stops learning about gender issues. These words have become common, but I feel that people, and maybe I at some point, misunderstood. We talk about equity, but we don't focus on it the way we did today in the training. For example, I had heard of the difference between sex and gender, but it helps to go back to the basics, because it always ends up being a new conversation and an opportunity to grow the projects. We commit to opening communication channels within the team, to talk about our objectives and where we want to go.”

Environmental Manager, PHP Energy



El Níspero, 2021.

1 All participants reported a significant increase in gender awareness:

Greater knowledge of key gender concepts



Understanding of why gender is important for the project



How to integrate a gender perspective into energy projects

2 10 women entrepreneurs from the community trained in a dynamic workshop that gave them the space to reflect on issues of self-esteem, empowerment, and leadership.

Despite not knowing each other prior to the workshop, the women participants developed friendships and connections which opened the door for strategic business partnerships in the future, in addition to a network of support to share experiences and knowledge. At the end of the workshop, they shared contacts, recognizing the importance of collaborating with each other. Additionally, these women recognize PHP Energy's interest in supporting the community.



Workshop with women entrepreneurs, 2021.

3 The leadership team developed and committed to an action plan to lead high-impact initiatives focused on business growth for groups of women entrepreneurs.

Throughout the project, PHP Energy leadership expressed high commitment and interest in supporting the growth of women-led businesses in the community. Upon identifying groups of high-potential women entrepreneurs and gaining a better understanding of their challenges and opportunities, the leadership team placed a significant focus on providing continued support. As such, the Ilu Fund team led the development of a detailed action plan focused on direct support to women entrepreneurs, gender-focused partnerships, and an active role in local community development commission led by the municipality and in collaboration with other key actors.

4 The team hired a new, permanent woman employee to lead and manage community engagement strategy and activities.

Upon recognizing the importance of actively engaging with the community, the PHP Energy leadership team decided to hire a new permanent woman employee from El Níspero itself. The objective for this role is to implement the strategic plan for community impact and inclusion, including to build communication mechanisms, systematize initiatives, develop and establish gender-focused partnerships, and design and lead programs.

5 The company partnered with established and gender-sensitive organizations to implement high-impact initiatives.

By working in collaboration with organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Pro Mujer, and the Centro de Desarrollo Empresarial, PHP Energy is now working in collaboration with leading organizations in gender-focused initiatives such as support to women entrepreneurs. The combined expertise, resources, and commitments are expected to maximize benefits.

6

PHP Energy now has an active leadership role in local committee for community development led by the municipality.



Committee for community development, 2022.

Alongside major international development organizations, local non-profits, and the municipality, PHP Energy is a leading contributor to community development strategic planning. Through constant participation in the committee's periodic meetings, the awareness of and positive reputation of PHP Energy is growing amongst community actors and leaders. Through their participation, PHP Energy ensures initiatives are designed with an inclusive gender perspective.

7

PHP Energy's support to women entrepreneurs has multiplied.

The team is deepening their support to the two groups of women entrepreneurs identified in the technical assistance project through a needs assessment, business training, and connection to market. For instance, PHP Energy connected the group focused on roasting and packaging coffee with the leading producer of specialty coffee in the region, as well as connection to local markets to grow sales. In addition, the team is actively building relationships with other women entrepreneurs, such as artisans that work with tulle, to expand their services going forward. As a result of these initiatives, the project team will have a stronger relationship with the community, which will reduce socioeconomic risk and ensure it's long-term success.



Supporting women entrepreneurs at a market, 2022



Tulle artisans, 2022.



Workshop, 2022.

This project was funded by USAID and implemented by Deetken Impact and Pro Mujer. All further inquiries about our technical assistance programs can be sent to impact@deetken.com. This case study was developed for the Ilu Women's Empowerment Fund by Rachel Murphy and Laura Teerijoki under the supervision of Magali Lamyin, Alexa Blain and Carmen Correa.