



ÓPTIMA ENERGÍA SHINING A LIGHT ON GENDER EQUALITY

In the port city of Ensenada, on the Pacific Coast of north-western Mexico, an investment in a street lighting project not only brought multiple benefits to the city; it also helped spark a cultural change within the company that carried out the project. Spurred by performance-based incentives that were built into a loan package provided by IDB Invest —part of the IDB Group— Óptima Energía began to look at steps it could take to improve gender equality and diversity.



Mexico

FINANCING:

modernize street lighting in the city of Ensenada using LED technology under an energy service company (ESCO) model

ADVISORY SERVICES:

promote diversity of talent and gender equality in the company

US\$
17.7 Million
IDB Group
financial package

US\$
9.1 Million
IDB Group A loan

+

US\$
6.3 Million
Canadian Climate
Fund loan

+

US\$
2.3 Million
Clean Technology
Fund guarantee

THE CLIENT

Based in Monterrey, Mexico, Óptima Energía is in the business of finding energy efficiency solutions largely for the public sector. In 2015, the municipal government of Ensenada hired the company to update the city's street lighting system, a project that would involve substituting 25,000 sodium-vapor lamps for energy-efficient LED lighting. For a city of close to half a million people, that would normally require a daunting investment. But under Óptima Energía's business model, the city is paying for the project over time, covering the costs entirely out of the savings being generated.



Given the potential benefits— a 60 percent drop in the city’s energy bill, lower CO2 emissions, reduced maintenance, wiser use of public resources, improvements to public safety— this was an attractive investment for the IDB Group, which agreed to help finance the project. The bulk of the loan came from the Canadian Climate Fund for the Private Sector in the Americas (C2F), a fund established by Canada and managed by IDB Invest to jump-start action on climate change.

One goal of both the C2F and IDB Invest is to promote gender equality and diversity, based on the rationale that companies perform better financially and become more innovative when they expand and diversify their pool of talent. Óptima Energía was on board with the idea, and the loan was structured to provide incentives for improvement in that area.

Only **15%**
of the company’s
engineers **were**
women

THE CHALLENGE: HOW TO INCREASE DIVERSITY

Like many energy and technology companies, Óptima Energía has had a male-dominated work environment, especially on the technical side. When this project started, only a third of the company’s 33 permanent employees were women, and most of them worked in non-technical areas. More than 85 percent of the engineering employees were male, as was the entire staff in purchasing and logistics. IDB Invest Advisory Services team helped Óptima Energía lay the foundations for a more diverse work environment.



THE SOLUTION: CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

The Advisory Services team worked with Óptima Energía to design a three-part gender program:

1. COMMITMENT FROM TOP MANAGEMENT

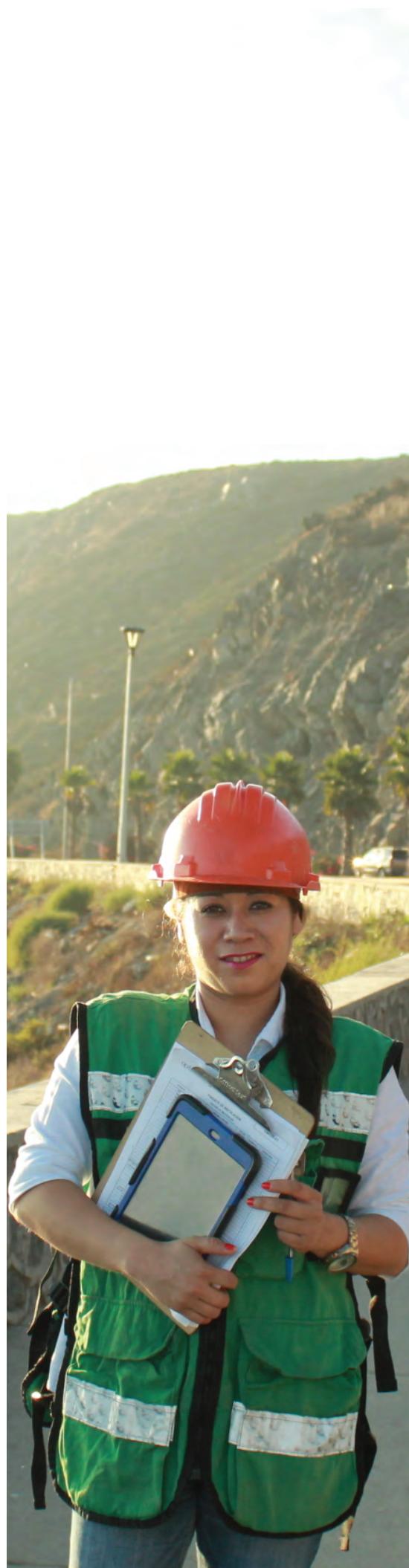
The creation of a culture committed to gender equality and diversity starts at the top, with a commitment by the company's leaders to their employees and other stakeholders. In 2015, CEO Enrique Gómez Junco signed the Statement of Support for the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs).

2. CREATION OF POLICIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF MEN AND WOMEN

While a formal commitment to gender equality is important to keep management accountable, progress is measured largely in concrete actions. IDB Invest Advisory Services team encouraged Óptima Energía to become certified under the Mexican Standards for Labor Equality and Non-Discrimination. These stringent government standards score companies on a wide range of indicators, including equal pay, sexual harassment policies, lactation rooms and paternity leave.

3. INCLUSION OF FEMALE TALENT IN NON-TRADITIONAL FIELDS

A key part of gender equality in business is ensuring that men and women have equal access to work opportunities. Given the small number of women in technical areas at Óptima Energía—and the importance of such jobs to the business—IDB Invest team worked with the company to design a professional paid internship program for female university students. Óptima Energía made a commitment to recruit these young women from technical fields, primarily engineering and related sciences.





THE TOOL: RESULTS-BASED INCENTIVES

IDB Invest Advisory Services team designed a multistep program —completely voluntary for the client— to peg the interest rate on the C2F loan to the results obtained on gender equality and diversity.

Components of the Gender Program at Óptima Energía	Results as of March 2017
<p>Signing of the Women's Empowerment Principles</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Óptima Energía signed the commitment in 2015 • It became the 13th company in Mexico and one of 1,400 worldwide to have signed on
<p>Certification of compliance with government standards on workplace equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Óptima Energía earned certification in October 2016 • It was the first company in the state of Nuevo León and the 20th in Mexico to obtain this recognition
<p>Annual professional internship program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six female students completed their internship in 2016, in the areas of engineering, purchasing and logistics, and finance and management • 1 of them was hired full-time • Three new female students were recruited for the 2017 program

IMPACT IN THE FIELD

The company's gender program has had an impact not only in the corporate offices in Monterrey, but also in the field. When Óptima Energía set out to hire temporary staff to work on the Ensenada project, it made an extra effort to interview qualified female candidates, and hired four women for positions traditionally held by men, including lighting assembly and jobsite supervision. Marcela Maldonado, Head of Human Resources, attributes this to the rigorous certification process the company had undergone: "The certification has contributed to shaping and strengthening the culture of equality that we have been developing as an organization overtime. It helped us support this culture with concrete policies."