

For more women technicians in the water and sanitation sector

An activity within the PROAGUA II Project framework

When 19-year-old Nery Sosa, from the agricultural dominated area of Piura, decided to study a technical career in water and sanitation, she was aware it was going to be a challenge; since she would be part of a field mainly dominated by men.

A World Bank study (2019), indicates that out of five people who work in the water and sanitation sector, only one is a woman. Peru is not an exception to this. According to the Technical Organization for the Administration of Sanitation Services (OTASS), 16 per cent of the management positions of the Sanitation Service Provider Entities (EPS) are held by women and only 6 per cent have a woman as general manager. Additionally, the National Superintendence of Sanitation Services (SUNASS) affirms that the participation of women in EPS is less than 20 per cent. Unfortunately, this situation has not changed in the last ten years; rather to the contrary these numbers may have decreased due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why is there little participation of women in the management of sanitation services?

One of the main reasons is the gender stereotypes that discourages women from studying careers related to water and sanitation. The common belief considers that working in a treatment plant is not a place for women as it is too dirty, dangerous, or too hard for women.

The National Training Institute for the Construction Industry (SENCICO), which provides the **dual technical training** in Peru,

reports that women represent only 18 percent of students enrolling in **water and sanitation technical careers**. Furthermore, the last two graduating classes consisted only of men students.

Diversity of perspectives

Several studies (UNESCO, 2022; USAID, 2020) affirm that during the decision-making process on complex situations regarding water and sanitation, a **greater gender equality is crucial to guarantee a better equitable and sustainable water management**. Gender diversity would also help EPSs to have a better understanding and capacity to respond concerns and needs of their costumers, increasing satisfaction with the provided service.

Therefore since a few years, **Sencico has been working to encourage more women to study technical careers**, providing information through motivational talks and activities; in order to close gaps in technical capacities and advancing on a greater participation of women technicians within this field.

The water and sanitation technical careers promoted by Sencico are based on a **dual training**. This means that students combine theoretical training with practical work within a company, which allows them to get knowledge and experience in real conditions, responding to the demands of the EPS.

15 women out of 82 people were enrolled in the “**Management of drinking and wastewater networks**” career in the year 2019.



Left: Students of the career “Management of drinking water and wastewater networks” from Sencico Piura, where only one woman is part of the class.

Right: Nery Sosa is the only female student at Sencico Piura. In this photo, she is operating a drinking water well monitor, during her dual training classes at EPS Grau S.A.



Three students fixing a power line. The common belief considers this work very burdensome and dangerous for women, but this photo shows they can do it.

In 2021 there were 8 women in Lima, 6 in Arequipa, and one in Piura. Although they are still few, the fact that they are enrolling is a great first step to encourage more women to do alike.

Nery is doing her best to gather knowledge in the subject and is determined to finish her dual degree; becoming the first woman graduated from a technical water and sanitation career in Peru.

During her studies, Nery Sosa received support of her professors and classmates, although at the beginning it was not easy. “I had to demonstrate that I could do it”, she says proudly “and I did it, and I hope to be the motivation for more women to choose this career. I am demonstrating that women can do it”.

The development of the dual training program in the water sector - with special attention to the gender issue - is being supported by the German Development Cooperation and the Swiss Cooperation - SECO, implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, through the **PROAGUA II project**.

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Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn

Av. Los Incas N°172, Piso 6, San Isidro
T +51 (1) 4412500 / 4411454
www.giz.de

Authors: Daniela Islinger

Catherine Cardich Salazar

Responsible: Ingmar Obermann (AV)
Carmen Zegarra

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