

JULY 2022

G-SEARCH CASE STUDY

PowerGen Renewable Energy

INVESTOR: [AHL Venture Partners](#)

SECTOR: Renewable Energy

REGION: Sub-Saharan Africa (Sierra Leone)

GENDER-SMART TECHNICAL

ASSISTANCE: Marketing to women

SAMPLE SURVEYED: 128 PowerGen customers

Introduction

PowerGen Renewable Energy (henceforth PowerGen), founded in 2011 in Kenya, provides reliable and cost-effective energy to low-income households via microgrids. With offices in four countries, including Sierra Leone, PowerGen has powered over 120 communities and 50,000 people with micro-utilities.

Gender-smart technical assistance (TA) activity: Gender-focused marketing campaign to encourage existing customers, especially women, to use more electricity

PowerGen, in collaboration with AHL Venture Partners and Value for Women (VfW; contracted by the investor), developed a gender-focused marketing campaign (jingle) with multiple objectives:

- Attract new customers (especially women home business owners),
- Encourage existing customers to use more electricity for household and home business activities,
- Identify women's marketing preferences, and
- "Plant the seeds of change" in the community's mindset about women's equal access and use of electricity.

The jingle aired four days per week on the radio (in Bo district) and three days per week via a public announcement (PA) system (in Bumpah; megaphones used in key market areas) throughout October 2021. The jingle promoted electricity by highlighting its benefits, such as completing household chores faster and enabling children to study at night in their own homes. This was developed based on customer feedback obtained through focus groups as part of VfW's and PowerGen's engagement.

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS



alphamundi



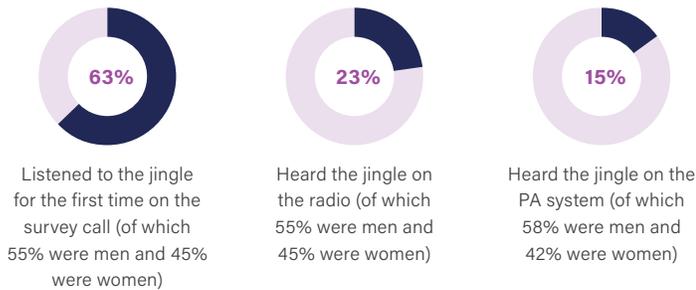
Shell Foundation | 



Methodology

The [William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan](#) (WDI) measured the effectiveness of the gender-focused marketing strategy in January 2022 as part of the [G-SEARCH](#) research. The sample consisted of 128 existing PowerGen customers (45% women; 64% of respondents did not have a home business). WDI, in collaboration with [60 Decibels](#), administered one survey to customers via phone that included questions on the period before (baseline) and after (endline) hearing the jingle¹. To learn more about the methodology and access the surveys, please [click here](#).

Results: effectiveness of the marketing campaign



The marketing campaign had some success in meeting its various objectives:

26% increase in the percentage of non-business owners surveyed who expressed interest in starting a home business after hearing the jingle

67% of home-business-owning respondents intended or would consider increasing their electricity usage by a little or a lot for the business

70% of respondents (83% of men; 54% of women) found the jingle to be helpful or very helpful in learning about the benefits of electricity

"It is essential to have a local gender expert such as a local woman organization to help us identify the best strategies to involve the men of the household when targeting women. We found that we cannot gain access to the women without first gaining the buy-in of the men of the household." —POWERGEN

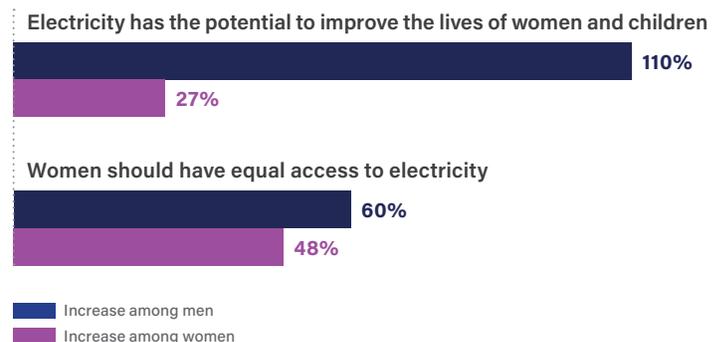
¹ If customers had not heard the jingle before the call, the enumerator played it during the interview.



The jingle boosted the perception of electricity's potential to improve the lives of all, including women and children:

	Baseline	Endline	Growth in percentage of respondents
More customers <i>strongly agreed</i> electricity had the potential to improve their lives	34%	56%	↑ 67%
More customers <i>strongly agreed</i> electricity had the potential to improve their business or provide an opportunity to start a new business	38%	67%	↑ 79%
More customers <i>strongly agreed</i> that women would benefit more than men from electricity in the home (due to the nature of their tasks)	30%	62%	↑ 103%

After hearing the jingle, there was a greater increase among men who acknowledged the value of electricity in the lives of women and children and the importance of equal access.



Results: Business outcomes

- Data collected by PowerGen during the pilot (with support from VfW) showed that in locations where the PA system was deployed, the company received an increased number of inquiries (55 men and 15 women) compared to an average period.
- PowerGen also received an increased number of phone calls regarding product inquiries by women (no quantitative data available).
- However, PowerGen confirmed that they could not attribute any financial benefits, such as increased electricity sales, new customers, net margins, etc., to the marketing strategy during the project period.



Additional results from Value for Women

VfW carried out key informant interviews with PowerGen at the close of the TA engagement, which generated additional insights on the value of the marketing campaign:

- PowerGen established a baseline understanding of the feedback from women and men customers, preferred channels for marketing messaging, and perceived benefits of electrification for women in Sierra Leone.
- PowerGen experimented with a new nimble communication strategy– the PA system, which helped them realize that customers valued face-to-face contact with PowerGen’s representatives.
- PowerGen identified that broadcasts via PA systems were an efficient marketing means, enabling more on-the-ground interaction with potential and existing customers. However, the radio broadcasts lent the jingle more legitimacy, as some customers were mistrustful of the PA broadcasts alone.
- Moving forward, PowerGen plans to continue collecting and tracking sex-disaggregated customer feedback based on the TA’s proven usefulness in informing strategy and product design.

Strengthening future iterations of the program

Respondents requested more information on how electricity meters worked to understand charges and the various payment options available to customers. They also shared other communication techniques that PowerGen could use to share information with customers: calls and in-person visits by PowerGen agents/village

technicians and community meetings at marketplaces and schools. In future marketing, Powergen can also address key challenges faced by women in using more electricity:



Respondents shared that women did not use home appliances as they lacked the money to purchase them



Respondents shared that women did not manage their own money as their husbands controlled resources



Respondents shared that women found the electricity tariff/cost too high

Conclusion

The TA created awareness of the benefits of electricity among PowerGen’s customers, encouraged women to start home businesses, and moved the needle on gender-equal access to electricity. PowerGen confirmed that they did not gain any financial benefits such as increased customers and sales from this TA engagement but gained business insights that would support future strategy and product design.

At present, PowerGen has deployed village technicians to have one-on-one conversations with men and women in the community on the various topics raised through the jingle.

For more information, please contact Yaquta Fatehi (Email: WDI-PerformanceMeasurement@umich.edu)