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Internship at Kenyan Electricity Regulator Sets Young Woman on Path to Career Success

February 2018 – Monicah Kitili knows how far she has come in life so far and has big plans for what is ahead. Born in the shadow of Mt. Kenya in the town of Nanyuki, she is the youngest of nine siblings and the only one to attend university. She studied economics at Kenyatta University and wants to help create meaningful change in Kenya and across Sub-Saharan Africa, including by working with young women rising from poverty. She aspires to be a renowned economist working with global economic research consortiums.

Recently, Monicah embarked on a path that will allow her to pursue her career goals and help improve the lives of others. As an intern at the Kenya Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC), Monicah is in the first cohort of young women participating in the Women in Energy Regulation Internship program, which fosters interest and advances career opportunities for young women in energy regulation. Supported by USAID’s Energy Division and Power Africa and implemented by the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, the program aims to help young women like Monicah build necessary skills to pursue careers at regulatory agencies, electric utilities, and other organizations.

“Before the NARUC Women in Energy Regulation program, I never imagined myself working in the energy sector,” Monicah said. “I have undergone a wondrous professional evolution and developed interest in working with regional and global energy and utility regulators to improve sustainable use of clean energy and improve delivery of service to citizens.”

Monicah added, “I seek to drive meaningful change in Africa and beyond through promoting renewable energy use in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has huge resource potential.” Broadly, the regulations and policies that shape electricity production and reliability have a significant effect on women’s lives, including access to education and health care. While it is critical that women play a major role in policy and regulatory decision-making, they are consistently underrepresented in energy regulation, particularly in technical and management roles.

The Women in Energy Regulation Internship program seeks to reverse that trend. The project places well qualified young women at regulatory agencies in USAID-assisted countries for six-month paid internships, enabling them to gain experience and knowledge on a range of regulatory issues. The program is currently being piloted with regulatory commissions in Kenya and Tanzania, with plans to potentially expand the program in the near future. Interns in both pilot countries are encouraged to engage with each other to discuss their projects, technical issues of interest, and professional aspirations, and to share candid feedback with USAID and NARUC on a regular basis.

At the halfway point in her internship with the ERC in early 2017, Monicah reported that she has developed not only technical skills but also grown as a professional in the workplace. “I have become a master of time management,” she said. “The commission has a fast-paced working environment with strict deadlines. Creating personal time out of tight schedules and providing quality work within deadlines is a vital skill that I have developed over time.”

She has also grown in her ability to work and stay organized on her own. “Unlike the university where most assignments were done through group work, I have learnt at the commission how to work independently, organize myself and prioritize through rearranging commitments to get the job done,” Monicah said. Looking ahead, Monicah sees new opportunities on the horizon that she would not have thought to pursue without the internship, including studying energy economics at the master’s level.

Through the Women in Energy Regulation Internship program, USAID aims to empower more women like Monicah to access new opportunities and strengthen women's roles in the energy landscape.

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