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Zambian Regulators Demonstrate Ongoing Commitment to Gender Equity in the Energy Sector by Hosting NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program



November 2020 – This past March, the Energy Regulatory Board (ERB) of Zambia became the newest host commission to participate in the Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program, organized by the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) with funding support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Power Africa. Through their participation, the ERB has demonstrated continued dedication to increasing gender equity and empowering women in the workplace.

While numerous studies have shown that gender diversity in the workplace is correlated with both profitability and value creation,ⁱ the energy sector remains among the least gender diverse parts of the economy. Gender gaps in employment vary widely among different energy sub-sectors, with women only accounting for 22% of the labor force in the oil and gas sector and 32% in renewables.ⁱⁱ In order to drive the innovation needed to provide a more secure, affordable, and sustainable energy future, drawing on the talents and creativity of both men and women is essential.

With this in mind, USAID recognizes that expanding women’s participation in the energy sector – particularly in decision making roles – can help to advance economic growth and equity, enhance financial health and sustainability across the sector, and promote a path to self-reliance.ⁱⁱⁱ Funded by USAID and Power Africa, the NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship program aims to support these objectives by helping young women build knowledge in energy regulation and gain the necessary technical skills and experience needed to pursue a career in the energy sector. After completing the program, participants are better enabled to become attractive candidates for employment within the host commission, other regulatory agencies, government ministries, utilities, private energy companies, or consulting firms.

Implementing Gender Policy

The goals of the Women in Energy Regulation Internship program are in line with Zambia’s National Gender Policy, which aims to “achieve full participation of both women and men in the development process at all levels in order to ensure sustainable development and the attainment of equity and equality between sexes.”^{iv} As stated in the policy, the Government is working to ensure that gender mainstreaming takes root across all sectors – including the energy sector – as a means to achieving equitable and sustainable socio-economic development.^v

Together with implementing national policy, the importance of energy regulators in promoting gender equity is critical. Women participate in the energy sector as energy users, employees, participants in the energy value chain, and as decision-makers and stakeholders. As stated in the USAID/NARUC resource [Practical Guide to Women in Energy Regulation](#), by supporting women as employees and policy-makers, regulators can make progress toward equal representation and opportunity in a

historically male-dominated field, provide women with decision-making agency on energy, and help to broaden gender perspectives throughout the supply chain.

Providing education and training opportunities is one of multiple strategies listed in the [Guide](#) to overcome barriers and promote a gender-equitable workforce in the energy sector. In this context, the ERB maintains an internal Women Empowerment Policy. This policy is meant to increase women's participation in the energy sector through recruiting and empowering women that meet the necessary skills, qualifications, and experience. The ERB supports their female employees by providing the training and experience necessary to assume leadership and strategic positions within the ERB and the energy sector as a whole.^{vi} Through enacting this policy and participating in the NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship program, the ERB is on track to integrating and retaining more female employees.

The ERB's first Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program participants are Ms. Fridah Nkunde and Ms. Kalunga Nyambe, who support the Technical Regulation Department and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Department, respectively. Over the past six months, these two promising young women have not only acquired technical knowledge on licensing, incident investigation, open access regulation, internet connectivity, and system administration, but have also developed critical experience in navigating a professional office setting, managing their time and resources, and networking with colleagues at the ERB and other energy sector organizations.

In the Spotlight: Fridah Nkunde



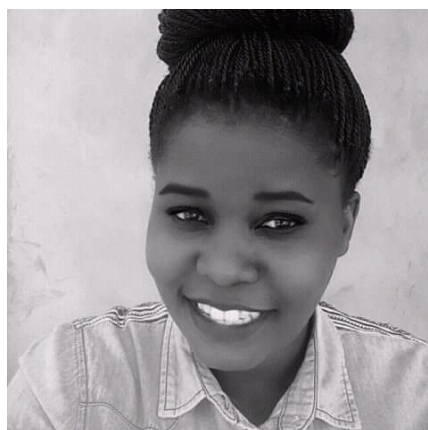
Fridah Nkunde graduated from the University of Zambia, School of Engineering, where she majored in Electrical Machines and Power. At the ERB, she quickly became a vital member of the team within the Technical Regulation Department. Prior to joining the ERB, she worked as an Electrical Engineering Intern at Mopani Copper Mines PLC, where she was responsible for the planning and maintenance of protection equipment under the electrical distribution section.

As her desire has always been to work in the energy sector, she is glad she did not “think twice about having gone for the rare opportunity of participating in the Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program.” At the ERB, she is learning “everything there is to know about energy regulation, from the tools and resources essential for delivering on the ERB’s mandate, to the systems that need to be developed to ensure reliable and sustainable energy for everyone.” Fridah has also used this opportunity to identify additional skills and knowledge she aims to acquire in order to continue her career development.

Throughout the duration of her internship, Fridah received glowing reviews from her supervisor, who was constantly impressed with the quality of her work and her initiative. For this reason, the ERB extended her internship for another six months at their own cost. In addition to her previous roles and responsibilities, she will take on additional tasks that will serve to further accelerate her growth and learning opportunities.

Fridah believes that the NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Program has accorded her the rare opportunity to build relevant experience that she would not have been able to obtain anywhere else. Armed with new skills, she will have an advantage over her peers when pursuing other opportunities that may arise within the sector. After the internship, she hopes to be considered as a potential candidate for permanent employment with the ERB.

In the Spotlight: Kalunga Nyambe



Kalunga Nyambe supports the ERB's Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Department, where she has “gained a wealth of experience and knowledge.” Kalunga earned her bachelor's degree in computer science at Cavendish University in Zambia. Preceding the NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program, she never imagined she could work in the traditionally male-dominated energy sector, let alone for an energy regulator. So, upon seeing the position advertised on her university's online job board, she jumped at the opportunity to apply.

Kalunga's core duties include operating the ERB's Service Desk, through which she responds to queries related to software and hardware matters. Her role enables her to learn how the ERB's systems contribute to achieving the organization's goals and mission. Through the internship, she has also successfully honed management skills such as teamwork and time management, which are vital for her career development. Kalunga has found it particularly rewarding to be a part of the planning process for the 2021 ICT activities workplan.

She asserted that taking on this internship program “has been one of the wisest choices [she has] made towards her career development.” She continued by saying: “I am confident that at the end of the NARUC Women in Energy Regulation internship program, I will be fully equipped to work in the energy industry as the ERB has been an excellent training ground for me. I have no doubt that if given the opportunity, I will thrive as a future energy sector professional.”

Displaying Resilience and Adaptability

Though the onset of the coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic necessitated rapid changes in ERB's operations, the Commission ensured that Fridah and Kalunga were able to continue their work through the Women in Energy Regulation Internship. Moreover, both women were able to take the uncertain circumstances in stride and learned to adapt to new workplace policies while gaining first-hand insight into the ERB's coronavirus response. As Fridah and Kalunga proceed to learn more about energy regulation and what their future careers might look like, their resilience and eagerness to learn will allow them to thrive in the energy sector. Additionally, the ERB's resolve to implement its gender policy and empower female employees will undoubtedly inspire more young women to seek opportunities to enhance their skill and career development while contributing to a more gender-diverse workforce.

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ⁱ “Delivering through diversity.” McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity?cid=other-eml-nsi-mip-mck-oth-1802&hlkid=5bb59d87545a4618a8ec01d54f62dcc3&hctky=10279150&hpid=cf69bc13-2f25-43e6-8c6d-793294bbe44e#>

ⁱⁱ “Gender diversity in energy: what we know and what we don't know.” IEA. <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/gender-diversity-in-energy-what-we-know-and-what-we-dont-know>

ⁱⁱⁱ “Engendering Utilities: Strengthening Utilities through Gender Equality Initiatives.” <https://www.usaid.gov/energy/engendering-utilities>

^{iv} “National Gender Policy 2014.” Republic of Zambia Ministry of Gender and Child Development. September 2014. <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/zam152916.pdf>

^v Idem.

^{vi} “Women Empowerment Policy.” ERB. PDF file.