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Promoting Women’s Participation in Energy Regulation: **Zambian Interns Tell All**



March 2023 – Since 2017, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Power Africa, and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program has partnered with energy regulators from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, and Zambia to place young women in short-term positions within their country's energy commissions. Over a period of six months to one year, interns are given substantive responsibilities and receive hands-on training in the field that exposes them to critical aspects of energy regulation and helps them to gain the foundational technical skills, professional experience, and institutional knowledge needed to pursue a career in the sector.

NARUC connected with Katayi Katanga and Muyoba Likando to learn about their experiences with Zambia’s Energy Regulation Board (ERB). The following interview allowed us to get a closer look at their experiences during the internship program, what they learned from it, and how it influenced their potential career paths.

Q&A

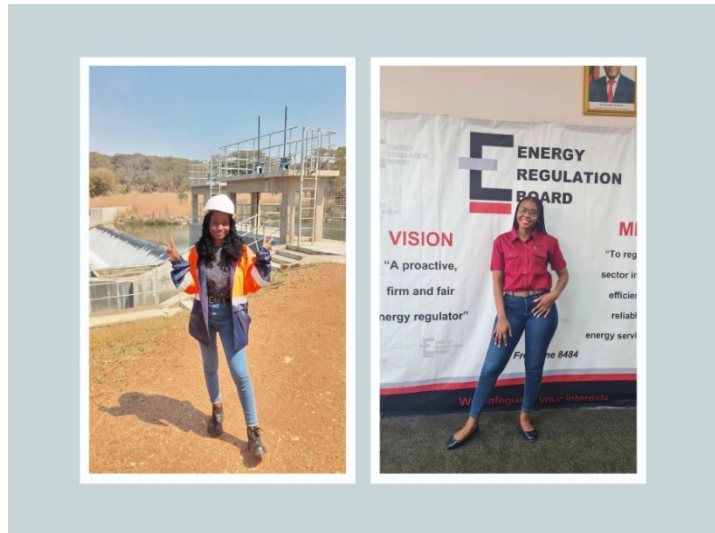
Can you tell us about yourself and your educational background? Why did you choose to participate in the USAID/NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program?

Katanga – I have a Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering, which I obtained from the Iowa State University of Science and Technology in 2019. I chose to study electrical engineering after a lesson on rural electrification in sixth grade. This lesson opened my eyes to the importance of electricity, as I realized how it allows children the privilege of a quality education and can improve their lives and opportunities after school. Also, after reading the description of the internship program, I thought I would be a good fit for it. I developed an interest in renewable energy after completing my final year project in college, which was on the design of a 60MW solar photovoltaic (PV) plant.

Likando – I am a graduate with a bachelor’s degree in chemical engineering from Copperbelt University, under the Faculty of Mines and Mineral Sciences. Prior to obtaining the position of Graduate Intern – Renewable Energy at the ERB, I was part of a team that worked on a process optimization project at a pyro metallurgical plant in the Serenje District. For a while, I had aspired to work in the regulatory energy space, and fortunately, the USAID and NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program made that a reality. As a female in this sector, it made me feel seen and my opinion heard. It was quite fulfilling to be part of a team that is in the forefront of driving the entire economy forward. This initiative is a catalyst in leveling the playing field in the energy sector, and I am more than glad to have been a part of it.

How did working at the ERB during your internship help to expand your knowledge of energy regulation?

Katanga – Interning at the ERB has helped me to realize that the sector is made up of several players, and as such, it is very important to standardize their modes of operation and create a level playing field through the creation and implementation of standards, regulations, and guidelines. Also, end users are at the core of the energy sector. The only way to ensure consistent delivery of quality services is to have regulations in place, which is exactly the primary work of the ERB. All of this has helped me to appreciate the role of regulation in the energy sector.



Likando – At the ERB, I served in the Technical Regulation Department under the Renewable Energy Unit. Working at the ERB provided me with extensive exposure and experience in the development of regulatory tools such as frameworks, standards, and licensing criteria; technical report writing; data extraction; and compliance monitoring. In addition, working in such an environment made me realize the importance of integrating sustainable solutions into every aspect of energy regulation, such as the utilization of sustainable manufacturing practices; sustainable exploitation of alternatives to energy; and sustainable development goals, with an objective of fostering ongoing economic growth and creating a favorable future for generations to come. I now think about sustainability in my daily tasks, and this is a mindset I will be able to carry on throughout my professional career.

Can you tell us about some of your hands-on training/work in the field and any valuable lessons you learned?

Katanga – Over the course of my internship, I carried out about 97 inspections. These inspections included construction permit applications, various licensing applications, and spot investigations. During field work, I learned good time management and organizational skills, as one must have a detailed plan of their activities to ensure that they are able to carry out all inspections scheduled for the day. Most importantly, I have developed the ability to communicate regulations in a nontechnical manner during inspections. Finally, another interesting skill I had to pick up is being firm and executing fairness during field work and inspections, as there can be a need to communicate noncompliance that needs to be rectified.

Likando – Throughout the internship program, I conducted performance monitoring of licensees to ensure they are compliant and to obtain feedback or identify areas that require improvement. This activity involves observation, an assessment of infrastructure and service offered, and engagement with the licensee through discussions. Thereafter, a technical report of the findings is generated with recommendations if need be. This experience has built my self-confidence. Further, the work environment has various personalities, backgrounds, departments, and professions. Gaining exposure to such a setting has nurtured in me the ability to effectively coordinate and communicate with my colleagues as well as with external people of interest in the energy sector to achieve common goals.

Do you feel that you have learned new skills that will increase your professional development?

Katanga – I like to think of professional development as a giant puzzle with many pieces that we pick up during various work experiences that eventually add up to make a fully rounded professional. Some of the pieces that I have picked up and developed during my time in this internship are:

- 1) Critical thinking and analysis – It is very important as a regulator to be able to analyze data from different perspectives to make informed decisions.
- 2) Continuous learning and innovation – One of my professors spoke often about the importance of being a lifelong learner. I have come to really appreciate this skill, especially while working in the renewable energy sector, in which new technologies are often emerging.
- 3) Social awareness – In promoting renewable energy technology in communities, it is important to understand their cultural beliefs, which in turn helps us to understand what technologies they might be averse to. Understanding cultures prevents the development of regulations that would encourage ‘white elephant projects,’ or projects that deliver little value or do not work as intended.

Likando – Simply put, I learned what worth ethic is – I did not know my brain could stretch as much and that I could work as hard until this internship pushed me past what I thought was possible. I came to appreciate that teamwork has great benefits, and that sharing knowledge is important to making great achievements. Further, the internship program taught me how to adapt and be comfortable in a professional setting. In the same vein, I realized that my confidence level has increased during both professional and personal interactions, and I attribute this to the exposure I acquired through the internship program.

Did any of the tasks you completed make you reconsider your career path or help you better understand what you want your career path to look like?

Katanga – I have always known that I wanted to work in the energy sector. This internship program has helped me to fully understand my career path and shown me the various routes I can take to achieve my dreams and goals.

Likando – The beauty about this field is that it has accorded me the privilege to obtain a good chunk of knowledge in electricity generation and supply, and to acquire non-technical skills including networking; planning and scheduling; professionalism; customer service etiquette; data storage; cross-functional communication; and collaboration. This experience and the knowledge I gained has been a significant steppingstone to the development of my career and will be beneficial to any company or organization I work for in the future.

Do you have any advice for other women who may participate in the internship in the future?

Katanga – My advice to other women would be that they should always feel free to ask questions. Be proactive and comfortable with asking to carry out specific tasks, and never shy away from doing things that are outside of your comfort zone or outside of what you studied!

Likando – I encourage other women like myself to be open-minded and proactive. This program creates an opportunity for women to take a lead in the energy sector, which is the engine of every developing economy, and promotes gender equality in a male dominated field. Aside from this fact, it offers the opportunity to acquire various skills and knowledge, nurture professional relationships with an assorted group of stakeholders, and gain exposure to how the industry operates. Its benefits do not only restrict one to their expertise or profession; they provide a well-rounded experience.

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Photo Caption: Katayi Katanga is pictured on the left, while Muyoba Likando is pictured on the right.