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An Interview with Tanzanian Interns on their Professional Development and the Importance of Female Representation in the Energy Sector



Flora Kikwilili, Program Intern
Tanzania Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority

"Studying and working hard is the core of success. Through the USAID, Power Africa, and NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program, women will be able to learn many new skills that will increase their professional development and expand their knowledge on energy regulation."

March 2023 – Worldwide, women are underrepresented in the energy sector. Studies attribute this to multiple factors, including women’s perceptions of the industry; insufficient access to information, finance, and training; corporate human resources practices; and cultural biases and norms about gender roles.¹ To address this issue and promote gender equity on a global scale, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is working to advance the [U.S. Strategy on Global Women’s Economic Security](#) in support of a whole of government effort that aims to, among other objectives:

- Promote women’s entrepreneurship and address a lack of mentorship and leadership opportunities
- Work to dismantle the legal, societal, and regulatory barriers that women face

Since 2017, the 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. NARUC recently connected with Caroline Maruchu, Flora Kikwilili, and Lucy Syelu, all of whom worked with Tanzania’s Energy and Water Utilities Regulatory Authority (EWURA).

The below interview allowed us to get a closer look at their experiences during the internship program, their views on the importance of supporting female representation in the energy sector, and what valuable lessons they have learned from hands-on training in the field. Following this interview, Flora Kikwilili accepted a position with Tanzania’s Geita Gold Mining Limited, which signed an agreement with Tanzania Electric Supply Company Limited (TANESCO) in 2021 to get its power from the national grid as a means of reducing diesel emissions and electricity costs.²

Q&A

Why did you choose to participate in the USAID/NARUC Women in Energy internship program?

Maruchu – I acquired a Bachelor of Science in petroleum engineering and wanted to make use of the knowledge I gained. Additionally, I am passionate about being a part of the energy regulation sector! When I heard about the USAID and NARUC Women in Energy Internship Program, its objectives were persuasive in that I could see myself as a part of women integrated into the energy regulatory community and contributing to advancing the cause of gender equity.

Kikwilili – I thought the internship program would be a great opportunity to develop and strengthen my skills and help me with my career path. Also, it seemed like it would give me exposure to the regulation of energy and water utilities and provide a great opportunity to work with EWURA.

Syelu – I chose to participate in the USAID and NARUC Women in Energy Regulation Internship Program to strengthen my knowledge and skills in the energy sector and gain experience in the different tasks that regulators perform.

Why do you think it is important to support female representation and gender diversity in the energy sector? Have you noticed these factors increasing in Tanzania?

Maruchu – Women are a key driver of innovative and inclusive solutions – female representation and gender diversity in the energy sector broadens perspectives, increases creativity and innovation, and improves decision-making. The available data on employment in the Tanzania energy sector that I have found states that 20% of employees are female, including 44% of staff at the Ministry of Energy (MoE), 20% of staff at TANESCO, and 26% of staff at the Rural Energy Agency (REA). This indicates an increase in supporting female representation and gender diversity in the Tanzania energy sector.

Kikwilili – Yes, I have seen these factors increasing in Tanzania. I think it is important to support gender diversity to give women the experience, skills, and knowledge to strengthen their career development. Also, it motivates many women to study courses in school that are relevant to the energy sector and gain exposure to it.

Syelu – Yes, I have! Supporting female representation and diversity in the energy sector helps to reduce gender bias and add focus on gender equality along the value chains of energy development, supply, and use. It is central to achieving equal opportunities and benefits.

How has working at EWURA during your internship helped to expand your knowledge of energy regulation?

Maruchu – While working at EWURA and taking part in petroleum mid- and downstream activities, I broadened my knowledge on how to protect the interests of consumers regarding the price, availability, quality, and reliability of supply; ensure public safety and the efficient use of natural gas by consumers; and promote fair competition in the supply of natural gas. In addition, I acquired tips on the regulation of other energy sectors – such as electricity and water – which will be important to enhancing the welfare of Tanzanian society.

Kikwilili – Working at EWURA gave me a new perspective on the roles different entities play in the energy sector and how they interact. For example, I learned about the rights and obligations of a licensee and their customers, which helped me to understand how to become a licensee, the procedure to obtain a license, as well as how to address customer problems as a licensee. On the other hand, I now know what to do as a customer to defend myself against a licensee if I experience unsatisfactory service.

Syelu – I expanded my knowledge of energy regulation by participating in inspections of several substations, performing monitoring inspections, and providing the public with knowledge about EWURA and its role.

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

Maruchu – I participated in checking compliance with technical, safety, and economic aspects in accordance with section 30(2) of the Petroleum Act, Cap 392, and other applicable laws of Tanzania. One of the most valuable lessons I learned was understanding the roles played by different associated facilities within natural gas processing and transmission infrastructure.

Kikwilili – One type of hands-on work I did was participating in compliance monitoring inspections, which is important for making sure that the generation plant is in good condition and delivers the required power. Also, it helps to maintain safety for the environment and the people around the field. These inspections helped me gain more experience as to what conditions the generation plants and substations should look like.

Syelu – I also participated in monitoring inspections, which helped me to understand the rights and obligations of consumers and regulated suppliers as well as how complaints and disputes can be resolved. These experiences taught me a lot about the duties, functions, and activities of the regulator.

How has the internship program helped you to navigate gender barriers?

Maruchu – I think that by gaining an understanding of the natural gas energy sector facilities and operations involved, the program has helped me to navigate gender barriers in the sense that I am more prepared to reach my career objectives.

Kikwilili – This internship program gave me more confidence about working in the energy sector, and the experience and knowledge I acquired showed me that anything is possible.

Syelu – I was able to gain exposure to the energy sector, build great relationships, and had the opportunity to learn from a mentor. These experiences gave me the opportunity to learn, make mistakes, and build my potential, regardless of gender.

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

Maruchu – Yes, I do feel like I have learned new skills. I now have professional skills, like understanding the applicable acts and policies at EWURA with respect to the midstream and downstream natural gas value chain. I have also learned technical skills on natural gas infrastructure, which will increase my professional development in the energy sector.

Kikwilili – One of the most helpful skills I learned was report writing skills from preparing inspection reports. I am also now confident in preparing presentations on inspection reports and delivering them.

Syelu – I have learned new skills that increased my professional development, including the preparation of licensing, tariff setting, and quality of service regulation for the electricity sector. I also strengthened my knowledge of computer skills since I did a lot of my work on the computer.

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

Maruchu – My advice to other women who are currently participating or may participate in the internship program in the future is that, as once said by female leader Aya Chebbi, “Your power is your radical self. Find it.” In the context of the energy sector, women can achieve this by taking interest in energy regulation and pursuing a career they find to be fulfilling.

Kikwilili – Yes, my advice is that studying and working hard is the core of success. Through this program, women will be able to learn many new skills that will increase their professional development and expand their knowledge on energy regulation.

Syelu – I would tell them that the internship is good, and that they will learn many new skills that will increase their professional development and expand their knowledge on energy regulation.

USAID recognizes that access to energy is critical to support women’s equality. What do you think can be done to support other women like yourself in entering and succeeding professionally in the energy sector?

Maruchu – I think it is important to ensure the effective execution of policies and legal frameworks that are set up to support gender equality. Conducting capacity development activities such as creating mentorship programs within energy sector companies and offering training modules, workshops, and employment opportunities to women in energy fields is also key. This will help connect women into the energy sector and disseminate information on the role of women in the sector.

Kikwilili – In order to support women in entering and succeeding professionally in the energy sector, it would be helpful to establish policies that promote gender equality in the sector and ensure that women are not neglected in terms of education and job opportunities.

Syelu – Establishing a training program for professional development as well as developing and offering refresher trainings on topics specific to the sustainable energy sector would be a great way to provide support.

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¹ “Bridging gender disparities will be key to energy sector transition and post-COVID-19 socioeconomic recovery.” UNECE. January 2022. <https://unece.org/media/press/364526>

² “New power supply agreement with Geita Gold Mining Limited will give TANESCO a Tsh5bn boost in monthly revenue.” Geita Gold Mining Limited. <https://www.geitamine.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/press-release-ggml-tanESCO-22-february-2022.pdf>