

The Women in Energy series is a joint project between USEA and USAID that was developed out of USEA's Engendering Utilities Partnership, a program funded by USAID to improve gender policies and gender outcomes at their respective organizations.



Every month we feature a woman who has shown exemplary leadership. We want to showcase your story this month. The women among you come from diverse backgrounds and roles, and they bring with them a unique perspective to gender equality within the energy sector.

Women in Energy Interview Questions

1. How have your education and career path led you to where you are now?

“As a young Rwandan girl, I have always been attracted to mathematics and physics and I knew that I will later study engineering. While in school, I was often discouraged by people stating that science studies were for boys but this never stopped me to pursue my dream; in contrary, it pushes me to work harder. I was also very fortunate to have wonderful parents that encouraged me to pursue what I liked and study hard.

When I started at University, my first choice was to study civil engineering unfortunately this option was not available at the University of the town I was living in and I had no choice than to choose between mining engineering, chemical engineering and metallurgical engineering. I therefore started metallurgical engineering. When back to Rwanda with my family after the liberation of the country, I was fortunate to get a scholarship from Rwanda and complete my studies. A few months after my graduation, I started to work in the mining sector and later converted to the energy sector.

My first experience in the energy sector is when I started working in the exploration and development of Lake Kivu methane gas and after few years, I was given the task to coordinate the exploration and development of geothermal resources. I later had an opportunity to pursue my second Master in geothermal energy. I have since worked in the geothermal sector and later assisted in electricity generation and distribution projects. Since May 2018, I have been heading the Off-grid and clean cooking department.

I would say that a degree does not always define a career path but there is a need to adjust with what is available and put all efforts to succeed where you are. Commitment, hard work and be opened to new opportunities out of your comfort zone will contribute to personal career development.”

2. Over the course of your career, have you witnessed changes in the sector that have launched more women into leadership positions?

“Despite the commitment of the Government of Rwanda in gender equality and women empowerment, I would say that the changes in gender equality and equity in the energy sector are only being seen now. Women had to work harder to get noticed in an organization.

When I started my career in the energy sector, women were few and not really exposed to leadership positions. Usually, most women fear to apply for managerial positions in a male dominated sector because of lack of confidence in their capacities even when having more experience than their men colleagues. This is unfortunately preventing women to get higher positions they deserve. Since last year, the company I am working for, the Rwanda Energy Group (REG), has taken steps to encourage the representation of women at all levels of REG management, equal opportunities to promotions and equal access to career development programs. I can testify today that women are really coming up in senior management positions at REG and this effort needs to continue.”

3. Technology is transforming the traditional utility business model into a more modern interactive grid. Some utilities view this transformation as an opportunity to focus on change management and diversity. Research provides compelling evidence that inclusion and diversity unlock innovation and drives better business performance. What, if anything, is your organization doing to attract, retain, and promote more women into senior management positions to respond to the dramatic industry transformation?

“At REG, women represent only 18% of the staff and REG is committed to increase this number to the Government target of 30% in all levels within the next 3-5 years. To reach this target, REG has recruited a gender expert to promote gender equality and equity within the company. The gender expert is assisted by gender focal points and an advisory committee representing all part of the country nominated within the company. So far, a gender audit survey and interview has been carried out at REG to better understand the issues faced by women and men in the company. A database for REG women with their qualifications, work experience and future professional development plans was developed for planning of future capacity building and career development. Furthermore, REG in its recruitment process is encouraging female to apply and this is opening opportunities to women in the company.”

4. Are talented women within your organization making it to top leadership positions? Why/why not?

“As said before, REG has recently taken measures to empower women in the sector and today we are seeing women in senior management positions. However, there is a need for all women to take the opportunities presented to them for advancing their career in the energy sector. Working in a male dominated company can be intimidating and difficult at times but we as women need to know our value and understand that our contribution is key to the economic development of the country.”

5. Companies that embrace diversity outperform their competitors. What type of diversity programs does your organization have in place to mentor future women leaders? How does your organization measure and report gender diversity? Is the data publicly available?

“The gender mainstreaming program at REG is still at early stage. Strategies and implementation plan are being put in place for gender mainstreaming. Tools will be developed to measure the gender diversity.”

6. What actions should the energy and electricity sector be focused on to accelerate change, increase diversity, and foster a better gender balance in the boardroom?

“Women empowerment has to start at an early stage. Young girls have to be encouraged at schools to follow technical studies. Mentoring and leadership program should be put in place in working place for young employees’ career development. Programs should be put in place to build women confidence and presence in the organization. Recently, REG in partnership with Women from the Program-Women in Rwandan Energy (WIRE) initiated by USAID Power Africa did an awareness on gender mainstreaming in the energy sector during a monthly community work known as Umuganda wherein both REG women and men technicians connected 130 households. This kind of activities will surely create change in the perception of gender balance in the energy sector.”