

Women inclusion in the Zambian water and sanitation sector

1.0 Introduction

In Zambia, since independence in 1964, only two female ministers have been responsible for the water and sanitation sector. Similarly, there has been only one female Managing Director since 1990 when the eleven water utilities were created. Furthermore, there was no female director at the ministry level in water supply and sanitation apart from one Assistant Director who was appointed recently. This trend is prominent in other water and sanitation organizations in the country. It is not surprising that gender inequality is recognized as one dimension contributing to institutional weakness.

Some of the factors contributing to gender inequality include stereotypes as the water and sanitation sector is predominantly perceived to be a male domain. Additionally, this is amplified by the lack of female role models in the field to encourage and inspire women to take up technical professions. This is a result of the comparatively fewer number of professional females in the water and sanitation sector in Zambia.

The situation is compound at primary and secondary school level with unhealthy school environments due to poor water supply and sanitation. This negatively affects Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in schools thereby hindering attendance of female learners leading to high school dropout rates especially at secondary school level. It has also been observed that the few women that have taken up studies and careers in water and sanitation related training programmes. Additionally, few women have generally not made much career progress thus affecting motivation of girls, despite these courses being considered as fulfilling careers.

1.1 GIZ support via the Reform of the Water Sector Phase II Project

The GIZ Reform of the Water Sector Programme Phase two (RWS II) focuses on improving the conditions for transparent planning and implementation processes for ensuring water and sanitation services (WSS), as well as competence development for professionals in the water and sanitation sector in Zambia. To support bridging the gender gap, The RWS II programme has two gender specific indicators;

- i. 4 gender sensitive WASH investment plans by 2022, and
- ii. to have 30 apprentices **with a minimum of 10 women** starting a first “dual-type” vocational training program for water supply technology, and 225 professionals from the water sector **with a minimum of 45 women** have each successfully completed one of 6 certified continuous education courses.

In order to ensuring these gender focused indicators are met, the RWS II programme also aims to mainstream gender throughout the other components. Two important components are the establishment of the Skills Advisory Group in the Water and Sanitation Sector (SAG-WSS) in September 2020 and the African women Sanitation Professionals Network in September 2021.

2.0 RWSII support in skills development in WSS

As outlined above, the skills development component of the RWS II aims at improving the competences of the current and future water and sanitation professionals with a special focus on female professionals. This is in line with the Zambian government target of female inclusion of at least 30% in TVET trainings. For this reason, these specific gender-differentiated measures were being implemented through the Skills Advisory Group Secretariat. Examples of the current activities include awarding best performing female TVET students in water and sanitation related programmes in the four partner Vocational Training Institutions to dismantle the perception that technical courses are only meant for the males. Additionally, there is a deliberate internship and attachment programme in Commercial Utilities for female students. On the other hand, careers outreach programmes will be conducted in secondary schools especially those with the vocational training pathway to encourage the participation of women in the water and sanitation technical training programmes.

2.1 African women Sanitation Professionals Network

The African Women Sanitation Professionals Network is an emerging network of African women focused on shaping, building and strengthening the engagement of African Women in the development of sanitation on the continent and globally. Its focuses on increasing the number, equipping and advancing the prominence of women in the sanitation sector to enable them to assume strategic roles, beyond being beneficiaries of sanitation services but as driving forces in the sector. The Network was initiated with support from GIZ due to the strong recognition regarding the lack of effective participation of women in the sanitation agenda. In several platforms, African women had no seat at the decision-making table and even when they did, their voices were not being heard. The Zambian Chapter of the network is currently being implemented with the support of the GIZ Reform of the Water Sector Programme Phase II.

The overall goal of the African Women Sanitation Professionals Network is to equip and advance the number and prominence of women in the sanitation sector, enabling them to assume strategic roles beyond being users of sanitation services. To achieve this, the following key actives have been forecasted:

- i. Setting up mentoring structure/scheme for women professionals to address the challenge of limited role models and mentors. The mentoring structure/scheme will bring in women from all regions to serve as role models for the younger members, whilst promoting continuous professional development for the senior women.
- ii. Supporting gender transformative approaches and female entrepreneurs along the sanitation service chain through collaboration with sector players to empower women as entrepreneurs and provide relevant training contributing to the development of the sector at community level.
- iii. Supporting female participation at regional and international conference and knowledge exchange to ensure visibility of African women in WASH on various platforms.

The network is currently comprised of students, accountants, engineers, environmental practitioners, planners, public health practitioners, water utility staff, academicians and more.

2.2 Skills Advisory Group in WSS

The Skills Advisory Group in Water Supply and Sanitation (SAG - WSS) was established by the Ministry of Technology and Science with its secretariat sitting at National Water Supply and Sanitation Company (NWASCO). SAG - WSS was formed in September 2020 and is a government-driven multi-faceted steering committee.

The committee aims at bringing the water and sanitation employers, employees, and skills providers together to exchange knowledge on skills and labour market needs. This will lead to improved WSS sector's skills demand and skills supply interface in a sustainable manner. One of the key activities of the SAG Secretariat is to operationalise the active participation and engagement of females in the water and sanitation sector by providing awards to best performing females in WASH related programmes, internship in the CUs and outreach programmes in training institutions.

The aim of the SAG-WSS will be achieved through the following objectives:

- i. Ensuring coordinated implementation of TVET programmes and projects in the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector.
- ii. Monitoring and evaluating performance of the skills development for TVET programmes and projects in the sector.
- iii. Coordinate internship programmes for students from TVET and other institutions.
- iv. Support development of in-service modular training courses for employees in the Water and Sanitation sector.
- v. Information sharing and consultation building on policy, strategic and technical issues concerning new developments in the water supply and sanitation sector
- vi. Increase awareness on promotion of women participation in Water Supply and Sanitation courses and Sector

- vii. Bring water and sanitation employers, employees and skills providers together to pool knowledge on skills and labour market needs.

3.0 Activities to empower women in WSS

SAG- WSS in partnership with AWSPN have the following activities to empower women in WSS;

3.1 Awarding

To increase awareness of promotion of women participation in the water and sanitation sector, the SAG-WSS intends to award best performing females in WASH, Plumbing and Electrical courses. The SAG Secretariat in partnership with the AWSPN have developed three awarding criteria for the females in the water supply and sanitation sector. The three awarding criteria are best performing, most innovative and most improved. With this incentive in place, more females will be encouraged to take up water supply and sanitation (WSS) related programs. The SAG-WSS in partnership with the AWSPN have developed a concept note which details methods on incentivising females to join the WSS sector.

3.2 Mentorship program

RWS II is supporting the development of a mentorship programme in partnership with the African Women Sanitation Professionals' Network – Zambia Chapter and the National Skills Advisory Group – Water Supply and Sanitation to ensure that both female students and professionals have a mentorship platform.

3.3 Guest lecturers

The SAG-WSS has facilitate guest lecture visits to Universities and TEVET colleges located in Lusaka and Luapula. These guest lectures are intended to interact with students and encourage them to join and participate in the water supply and sanitation sector. AWSPN has been invited to speak at the Guest Lecture visits.

3.4 Girls take-over

The SAG- WSS in partnership with the AWSPN intend to facilitate a Girl Take Over event. During this day, leaders and decision makers in the water supply and sanitation sector (WSS) will step aside to let girls take charge. Girls will critically understand the WSS and processes that are the sector. The girls will further appreciate the professionals in the water sector by touring the treatment plants, pumps and taking over most influential positions in the water supply and sanitation sector for a day, and to a large extent this will influence their future career choices. The girls take over will be a radical social and policy change to tear down barriers of discrimination and prejudice that continue to hold them back in the water and sanitation sector. By occupying spaces and places where they are rarely seen or heard, girls and young women will demand action to find solutions to ensure all girls can learn, lead, decide and thrive in the water and sanitation sector. Participants will be mainly young people, especially girls.

GIZ RWS II Gender Team

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- ii. Eng. Evans Tembo – Senior TVET Advisor
- iii. Ms. Fleur Sikkema – TVET Development Advisor
- iv. Mrs. Grace Mwanza – Urban WASH Advisor
- v. Esther Sinda – Junior TVET Advisor