



Empowering women through energy programmes and initiatives

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The Department of Energy (DoE) has embarked on several interventions to improve the lives of women in terms of job creation, decent work and sustainable livelihoods, and funding mechanisms for increasing opportunities for women's economic empowerment.

Towards this end, the DoE facilitates road shows as well as initiatives that facilitate training and information sharing for women in energy. Examples of these initiatives includes the Women in Oil and Energy (WOESA) workshops that have taken place in KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, and Gauteng provinces, in which women are informed of existing business ventures and opportunities within the energy sector, as well as mechanisms for financial support and capacity building. Going forward, it is also envisaged that this venture will reach out to women in the most rural areas and provinces not yet covered.

Among the most prominent initiatives in this programme involves solar water heater geysers, in which women can participate in the installation, maintenance, and actual making of the geysers themselves. The recent audit of the 'Liquid Fuel Charter', which provides the framework for the empowerment of Historically Disadvantaged South Africans in the liquid fuels sector, also aims to provide opportunities for women within the petroleum value chain. The Liquid Fuels Charter provides women with the opportunity to grow their stake in this well established industry. Yet the current low up-take of these opportunities – as stated in the audit – is of concern to the DoE, which is looking at ways of improving the situation.

In addition to the programmes referred to, the department also recognises the importance of continuing to strengthen relations with sector partners such as Women in Nuclear South Africa (WINSA). This facilitates the acquisition of research information necessary for planning appropriate measures to realise the vision and mission of WINSA; maintains a database of all women in the various nuclear related fields; links in with the worldwide association of Women in Nuclear and contributes to public information through participation in global WIN activities.

In the quest to ensure universal access to energy that is affordable safe and cleaner, the Department of Energy has undertaken a study of India's programme for training women solar panel engineers, and training on a South African version of this is due to commence in the near future. This will be followed by a pilot and roll out of this training and job creation programme to rural women.

In August 2011, the Department of Energy launched the South African chapter of the Clean Energy Education and

Empowerment Initiative for Women (C3-E) with our sector partners among the private sector, institutions of learning and research, business and NGOs. This is an initiative of the international Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM) forum. Through this initiative, the Department seeks to empower women of all ages to participate in the clean energy sector through business and professional networking, mentorship, coaching, training and clean energy ambassadorships.

According to the Clean Energy Ministerial forum, there is a well-documented gender gap in the clean energy professions, as well as in the broader science and technology fields. The numbers vary among countries and within sectors of clean energy (technology, policy, and investment, because clean energy is inherently cross-disciplinary), but it is broadly the case that more could be done to take advantage of women's potential contributions toward the clean energy questions of the future. There is also a business case for gender diversity; studies show that organisations' outcomes qualitatively improve when the leadership is composed of at least 30 percent of each gender.

Through the C3-E initiative, bursaries have been committed for girls to pursue studies in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (known as STEM). The areas of primary interest for DoE sponsored bursaries are specifically in clean energy. The steering committee and working groups on education, women empowerment, research and innovation, communication marketing and branding have developed a plan to implement integrated clean energy empowerment and education initiatives targeted at, and led by women.

Mentoring and shadowing of girls through the 'Technogirl' programme is implemented through involvement of our state owned entities and petroleum companies. In our attempt to address the challenge of scarce skills in STEM with our partners the Department continues to host the annual Learners Focus Week which is a career guidance and information session for Grade 9-12 learners from all provinces focusing specifically on the energy sector.

The Department also reaffirms its commitment to effective implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and meeting the Millennium Development Goals. This will be done by increasing skills development and training of young people, with a focus on girls in science and maths, and the provision of opportunities for employment and business for women in decision making positions in the energy sector. □