

New initiative to inspire more women to join engineering field

The Institution of Engineers Rwanda (IER) has rolled out an initiative that aims at among others increase the number of women practicing engineering in the country in a sector where they remain acutely underrepresented.

The initiative is part of the [Africa Catalyst Project](#) (ACP) that is funded by the UK-based Royal Academy of Engineering, which aims at strengthening professional engineering bodies across sub-Saharan Africa.

According to Eng. Cecile Uwimana, the coordinator of the project, this phase has a number of activities all aimed at increasing more women in engineering, including strengthening of the legal framework of the IER Women Chapter.

“We conducted a survey and found a number of women graduate in college but do not join the profession. As part of the project, we want to look for these graduates to find out what is it that bar them from practicing,” she said in an interview.

According to figures from the engineering body, currently, there are just 210 women registered engineers out of 2,544 members, making them less than 10 per cent, a far cry from the 30 per cent threshold women participation across sectors.

She said that during the previous phases of the project which focused on bridging the gap between the academia and the industry through professional internship programmes, they always fell short of the 30 per cent threshold female applicants.

“We even considered affirmative action by lowering the cut-off points for women applicants but we still could not find enough women,” she said, adding that this is why they want to conduct an extensive survey to find out why women study engineering but do not want to join the industry upon graduation.

The findings and recommendations from the survey, she said, will be handed to policymakers for action.

Another component of the project is career guidance, where they will work with at least five secondary schools offering Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to inspire girls in pursuing education in college.

“This will be done through an essay writing competition which aims at raising the level of understanding of the engineering profession among girls in high school. Besides the competition, the girls will be mentored and encouraged to pick an interest in the field of engineering,” she said.

Asked about the anticipated outcome of the project, Steven Sabiti, the Executive Secretary of IER expressed optimism saying that they will finally see more women considering to practice engineering, adding that there is a lot of space for them.

“Our hope is that through mentoring, more young women will be inspired to pursue engineering...aaAnd with the policymakers, it will give us time to openly talk about existing challenges and bring about positive change,” Sabiti said.

About ACP project

The Institution of Engineers Rwanda entered partnership with the Royal Academy of Engineers in 2016 and the first three phases of the project focused on placing engineering students from different institutions of higher learning on professional internship in different companies.

By the conclusion of the third phase in 2020, at least 210 students had benefitted from professional internship at different local companies that have partnership with the Institution.

Some of these interns ended up getting employed at these companies, while others gained enough knowledge and experience to even get better employment opportunities elsewhere.