

# ERA MAKING ITS MARK ON THE ELECTRICITY SUB SECTOR — WASAGALI

Dr. Sarah Wasagali Kanaabi is the current board chairperson of the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA). She spoke to **Agnes Kyotalengerire** on the contribution ERA has made towards the development of the electricity sub-sector.

## Who is Dr Sarah Wasagali Kanaabi?

Dr Sarah Wasagali Kanaabi is an economist, educationalist, strategic leader, a wife, a mother and a grandmother. She has worked in a spectrum of fields spanning from administration to lecturing, research, governance and leadership.

Dr Wasagali lectured at the Islamic University in Uganda, as well as Kyambogo University for 22 years before she retired.

## Tell me about ERA, its genesis and achievements over the years.

ERA was established by an act of Parliament, specifically the Electricity Act of 1999. So, ERA started its journey in 2000 with the mandate of licensing the generation, transmission, distribution, import, export and sale of electricity.

Over the years, ERA has had many notable achievements, for instance the generation capacity growing from 280MW. Currently, we stand at 1,352 megawatts, and from three hydro plants to 41 now with a mix of technologies spanning across solar, hydro, thermal co-generation and soon we are having the wind project in Moroto. In terms of generation, we have had an improvement.

We have also had grid coverage improve from 740km to 3,431km across the country. We have had increased customer connections from 180,000 to 1, 697,000. We have a competitive off-peak industrial tariff in the region.

We have seen a drop in the distribution losses from 34.4% to 16.8%. Electricity access has now increased from 10% to 57% and we have had improvement in quality and reliability of supply. We have had a



Wasagali (centre) during an inspection of electricity installations last year

number of achievements which have been recognised both nationally and internationally. So there is a lot and we continue to make these achievements as ERA for the sector.

## The energy sector has been one of the fastest growing in Uganda's economy. As a regulator, how have you been able to bring stability which has ensured sustained investment into this highly competitive sector?

Stability starts with the national peace and stability that has been ensured by the Government. As such, it has provided a conducive environment for investment. But, also, ERA has produced a transparent regulatory framework and we play a fair game. We have clear processes, procedures and guidelines, so whoever comes to play knows what they should expect.

These processes have been recognised by the African Development Bank as they feed into the regulatory framework that is not only on paper but also in practice in Africa. That is why we are ranked number one in regulatory performance.

I have an excellent team at ERA, that is part of the success and stability at the board management and staff levels.

Also, investors look at



Dr Wasagali

what they gain when they invest. So, our tariff regime ensures that the investments are sustainable.

## Uganda has of recent seen the emergence of competent and vocal women managers, with ERA being one of the institutions being steered by a lady. What's your view about the upcoming women managers in the energy sector?

Credit goes to the President who believes in women. He has fostered the empowerment of women and enabled them to serve at a strategic level, which provides a motivation to others.

Over time, the women in ERA and the sector in general have acquired positions through a competitive process. As such, recruitment is based on competence and where they have been given opportunity to lead, they have performed exceptionally well and I believe our chief executive officer is one of the best performers not only in Uganda, but also in the region. Despite that, we still have lower ratios of women to men in the sector. We should still join hands in closing that gender gap.

## The engineering field has been a preserve for men for many years. Why do you think women have chosen to take up the mantle?

The historical injustice and mindset in the past did not allow many girls to take on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, but we have seen that some achievements have been made through Government initiatives, the legal framework, the policy environment and the affirmative action that has been undertaken by government.

As such, we are seeing some changes in the mindset of the population and also in the framework that government has instituted. The electricity supply industry is a role model as far as

## Uganda's power tariffs are high. What do you think it would take to diversify this sector and exploit more power sources?

We are not depending on hydro power only. We have a generation mix; bagasse, thermal, solar, although hydro constitutes almost 80% of the power generated. Our tariffs currently reflect the revenue requirement of the Sector across the entire value chain for generation through transmission to distribution but as the demand grows, the tariffs will continue reducing.

We have a competitive off-peak tariff for the industrial consumers and, recently, we instituted the declining block tariff for domestic consumers at Shs.412 per kilowatt hour for cooking.

We also introduced the industrial park pilot tariff of US Cents 5 per kilowatt hour, and, depending on how it performs, we shall roll it out. In addition, we introduced the biomass to electricity cooking initiative in institutions. The initiative was launched at Mulago Hospital and we are now rolling out to prisons and schools at a tariff of Shs.451 per kilowatt hour for cooking. It is far cheaper than charcoal, firewood and it saves a lot of energy. We shall continue to initiate, where necessary, towards better tariffs.

gender mainstreaming is concerned. Soon, we shall be there with more girls taking up the science courses.

As ERA, we are trying our level best to make the work environment conducive for women, especially mothers.

## What has ERA done as an institution to groom women managers and empower them to take the lead?

The women in ERA are recruited through a transparent and competitive process. So there is no special consideration; one has to compete for a position. As such, we recruit the best as ERA.

But the energy sector has also instituted an annual programme code-named the women in energy project. As such, every year, especially in the month of March, the women in the energy sector go out to schools to talk to girls, encouraging them to study science subjects, believe in themselves and excel so they take over from us.

Additionally, there is also capacity building in the sector, where some resources are allocated to recruit fresh graduates by licences for continuity. Of these, about 40% should be women. We also encourage the recruitment of scientists. The programme over time has born fruits and we are seeing some contributions

to the sector which is encouraging.

## What is your view on women in the energy sector? Do you think Government has done enough to encourage more participation of girls in the study of sciences?

Government has played its part in ensuring the regulatory, policy environment and the affirmative action exists. It is upon us to play our part, all sectors should actually join Government to support the gender mainstreaming policy.

As a result, we should all aim at breaking the bias and encouraging girls to study sciences, technology engineering and mathematics. We should all participate in sensitising the population to change their mindset towards sciences.

## What are your prospects of the energy sector in the next 5-10 years?

In the next five years, I envisage affordable power, where the tariff will continue to be favourable to the consumers. I also envision improved access to electricity and improved quality and reliability of supply, generally and increased demand as a result of increased generation. And these are the focus areas of ERA and the Government as derived from the National Development Plan III.