

Meet the lady who has transformed the Geological Society of Kenya



The Chairlady, Geological Society of Kenya, Ms Gladys Kianji OGW, Professor Eric Odada - Professor, Department of Geology. PHOTO | File

By Dennis Muritu

For the first time ever, since independence, the 1st draft Geology Bill is complete and awaits stakeholders input before being presented before Parliament for deliberation and enactment.

This is the initiative of the Geological Society of Kenya outgoing Chairperson Geol. Gladys Kianji. Apparently exiting the society with so many firsts, she is the first woman chairperson of the geologists male dominated Society and the youngest so far having been elected chair in her early 30s.

Having received the Order of the Grand Warrior (OGW) from former President Kibaki, she views herself as a visionary and transformative leader. She has re-branded and transformed the society since taking over the helm back in early 2011.

Since taking over the helm of the Society, Gladys Kianji set up first private operational office of the Society in its 40 years since 1974 with a fully-fledged secretariat. Besides, the Society now has its first Strategic Plan to guide its operation.

"The draft Geology Bill seeks to ensure that the geological profession and geological services are regulated," says the Chairlady.

"When I first quickly carried out a survey in the form of a questionnaire to find out members' needs, it was apparent that there was need to take care of the welfare of the members. I therefore formed a welfare, which is now funded by the membership. I have also conducted member trainings in leadership, management and finance from the society's kitty. The training on advocacy is funded by the Business Advocacy Fund (BAF). This has increased the member's capability and improved the executive leadership skills," she explains.

Kianji is proud that during her tenure, the membership has increased by 50 per cent. The membership now stands at 500 hundred professional members and 200 students' membership, bring the total membership to 700.

The active membership has also risen to 70 per cent from 20 per cent.



Geological society of Kenya Chairlady Mrs. Gladys Kianji. PHOTO | FILE

She is categorical that in the four years, she has managed to raise the enthusiasm of the members and managed to increase the revenue of the society from KSh1 million in 2011 to KSh7 million in 2014, in total about KSh15 million revenue collection since 2011.

What do you require to be geologists? "You need to be good in the science subjects. Geology is an applied science and not a social science. You need to pass well in the sciences mainly mathematics, chemistry and physics.

Many will be suppressed that geography is not a prerequisite but rather an added advantage. Geology has been taught solely at the University of Nairobi but we now have South Eastern Kenya University (SEKU) also training thus the society is advocating for people to know geology throughout the country," explains the Chairlady.

The cut-off points for one to do a degree in geology is now A- at the University of Nairobi (UON) and the society is continuously carrying out

sensitization in schools and through the country conducting mineral and mining clinics in Kitui and Kwale towns.

"In order to reach out to the region, I started the GEOEACE 2014 (Geo-East African Conference and Expo 2014) which was a major success with more than 400 participants. The conference was co-hosted by the Ministry of Mining and officially opened by the deputy president William Ruto and the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Mining, Najib Balala. Another is slated for September this year.

Says Kianji: "We have passed the strategic plan for a Sacco called the Madini Sacco because we believe the Sacco is going to transform and change the member's lives."

The chairlady confides that in geology, one looks for what is below the ground or rather below your feet when standing outside. Geologists literally X-ray the earth and read the signature of images and interpret their findings. They then proceed to drill like a doctor does to the human body to confirm the findings.

The society has also been in talks with the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC) for better terms of service for the geologists and this has borne fruits because the field allowance has improved but we insist on the improvement of risk allowance because most geologists lives are at danger.

The second largest employer of geologists is now the Ministry of Mining which recently re-structured to cater for the sector more effectively. The launch of the strategic plan and the online mining cadaster has greatly increased efficiency in the sector.

"We are currently following on paid internships for students with the ministry of Mining so that young graduates are eased

into the profession with minimum constraints after the first degree. The enactment of the Mining bill now at senate approval will greatly streamline the sector and to say the least "it's long overdue."

The Ministry of Energy and its affiliates is the largest employer of geologists with more than seventy in geothermal, coal, oil and gas and the nuclear energy research. The newly formed Ministry of Water and irrigation is going to be a key player to the sector. It will also be a large employer of geologists with its parastatals the Water Resources Management Authority (WRMA) among others.

"We also have geologists working in the private sector mostly in Private Mining, petroleum, hydrogeology, consultancy, environmental lead experts, private mining, health sector, manufacturing etc," acknowledges Kianji.

Geol. Kianji observes that the country is moving in the right direction in exploiting and utilizing its minerals potential through the ministry of mining, its geo-energy resources through ministry of Energy and petroleum and now its water resources through the ministry of water and irrigation. "We are probably the only profession that dominates three ministries and our role cannot be assumed," she notes.

Resources need to be put aside to ensure that we have more well trained geological experts, have adequate finances to explore and systems must be enhanced to improve extraction and value addition of resources were it pertains to minerals so that the country can have maximum benefits.

Members have also embraced the use of the title Geol. as an identifier of their professionalism. Professionalism must be embraced at all times.