**Interview transcript – Senior engineer, businesswoman, Nairobi**

**Respondent:** My name is ….., Kenyan by birth. I studied in Canada. I will not talk about ages here but I was dedicated in UK for my A levels. Then went to Canada and did my first degree Bachelor in science and went on to do a bachelor in engineering in environmental. At that point we did not have any petroleum engineering and through my first internship at a large Canadian consulting company, I was fortunate enough to meet a lady who eventually become my mentor but I was working under her group. She was looking at the environmental impact on communities in regards to pipeline. We were looking at building the maritime north east pipeline that time it was never built and this was part of the cabal gas fields. So, there was that interest in the oil gas industry of course we got to see the major players and as fortunate enough to end up in Houston where my career then started in what is known as the oil field service sector. The company I started with was called … and it is well known in the US. If you have heard of …., they are in that same way. I moved to the US and started in the marketing department even though I had an engineering degree. I was new to the US and basically got to learn about the business. It was a very good group. I was exposed to both North American Mexico and had access to very senior people all up to the CEO when I was doing particular reporting. So again it’s a very wide scope and decided I wanted to go into sales. I thought sales was good, I looked around and there were no women doing sales so I approached the regional sales manager in Houston and he took one look at me and said it will never happen and I could not understand why and I remember they were merging with a company I forget the name but this company was bringing on board a woman and she was not technically trained and I said I am technically trained and surely that would have an advantage and he said yes you will be technically trained but you have never been in the field and it is going to take you 5 years or more and I left his office very dejected and thought where do I go from here.

It so happened that they have what they call that time associates and everyone went through this program 1 year and they exploit you to the full product lines that they had so you are working in the field and doing classroom. So, I approached my boss and said look I am going to apply to get into this program and he looked at me and said why would you want to do that? You have a very nice job and I said its… I feel not really utilizing my skills set and I look around and do not see any women and it bothers me and where we are there are lots of women. So, he encouraged me to go and I applied and was accepted. I went through the program and it was very rigorous because there was a good mix of men and women international as well as American. I passed and decided to go in a line called hydraulic fracture engineering, that’s what I did. I worked at that time mainly onshore then I was put out into the district. So, I worked as a field engineer and worked my way up. I was exposed to a whole village of huge frack of operations. Again, I was the only woman, only minority in terms of technical. The field was very difficult. I did it for about 2 years. it was a very lonely experience. I did not have family or anybody around and I did not have anyone I could turn to, not a woman who really understood some of the stuff I was going through, but I learnt a lot. It taught me how to interact with men in the field and how to be confident. I watched how men interacted and not that these men were intelligent than I was, especially if I looked at my peers the engineers, but they always seemed to have this sense of yes I can do it even if they knew 10%.

I remember one thing in particular every time I had an operation and there as the lead engineer and I had customers and I always made a point to always welcome my customers or my clients and I always made sure I had served them tea and cooked donuts because donuts were a big thing and one day my district manager came in. This is a field operation and he said, ‘can I have a word with you?’ So I went out with the main van and said yes, what is the problem? He said I never ever want to see you serving tea to any man in this operation. I looked at him and said yea but my culture and I am Kenyan but he said I do not care.

You are an American and you are in America, you understand. This is how we do things. These men will never respect you. It does not matter how good you are. So, I was like really? Okay. So the next day I came back what goodies I liked to bring to the site and I remember walking and said, ‘everybody, there are the goodies, help yourself and I went to my seat and started getting myself ready for the job. It was hard for me but that was the beginning of a good lesson. I really thank my district manager. We butted heads in many things, but he taught me in his own way. So, I had said I was there for 2 years…I went on and was brought in as a regional engineer and so in 2006 I went international with them. I was stationed in Aberdeen and I was there for about 3 years and worked as a regional engineer for Europe and Africa and in Africa I was mainly looking at West Africa it was offshore work. I also did a little bit of offshore work in America, Houston, and Gulf of Mexico just before I moved to Aberdeen. Again, I was a minority. There were a couple of women but in terms of what I was doing, I was the only woman and there was always this thing of everybody watching you and you realize you had to be very good, you had to be better than the most.

Personally, I think if I was a woman, not necessarily an African woman, I think it would be a bit easier; seeing some of my white female engineers went through. But really, it was not a bother for me, I saw it always as a challenge, to knock away people’s perception. I remember one other incident, this was back in the states. I tended to work in areas that were very racist or come across very racist clients. You are always trying to justify where you come from. But I got to a point where I realized it`s your work that spoke for you and one particular operation we had, the client refused to do the job.

Actually 2 operations I remember clearly the client refused because they wanted a white American engineer and my boss, my district manager stood up for me so whether he stood up for me because there was no one else, that is debatable ,but I thought he stood up for me and said, look if you do not have her the operation will shut down and we do not know when we will have time because this is an extremely busy period when we could re-slot them. So the client agreed and we did a fantastic job and I went and fracked all the wells. Anytime he had an operation (the client), he always called on me and this was with other major clients. That was another big lesson. Know your work, know more than your work and I am a people`s person so one of my thing is to always break down those barriers and for a very long time I stayed in touch. When I left the US it was very touching a lot of them were very sad to see me go more so more than I expected even in my office area. They were very sad and told me they appreciated the work I did. I was a hard worker, I never complained. I did things I thought I went to engineering school why am I doing this but again I felt it was a test to see if I could hack it. One of the things especially when I went to international, I always had this desire of going to east Africa and there nothing was really happening. After Aberdeen I moved to Angola about 2009 and it was a very tough place, very expensive, very fast moving. As you know it is the second largest producer depending on what you are looking at in Africa. So it was a very exciting time doing some expensive offshore projects. Then I had this opportunity to move to Uganda when it was buzzing so I moved in 2011 with (Baker house) as the business development manager so decided after engineering doing operations for a while it was time to move more to the business side. My eye was always going to management so I had another very good boss who I still keep in touch with and he encouraged me to come to Uganda and I worked the eastern Africa a market that basically at the time it was just Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Then in 2013 the business fell in Uganda the exploration business. Then I moved to Kenya I was senior business development manager and looked after from Ethiopia to Mozambique and not only in oil and gas but looking at geothermal. Geothermal was actually a big push for my side because of causes so many parallels on drilling services. It was not hard to crack but anyway I did have a chance one time to move back to the US. I would say about between late 2014 and 2015 and as you know then the global market really hit so I look hard on myself saying where do I want to go because I wanted to make that next move into country management. But this time I was with (w) so let me back track a bit. I moved to Uganda with (w) baker to Angola then moved to Uganda with (W) then moved to Kenya. All this job I was doing within Africa and Europe I was still an expatriate so I lived a very good life then I looked round and remember talking to one of my senior bosses and said why aren`t we seeing women running operations? There is absolutely nothing. I remember them bringing a lady from Equatorial Guinea who was supposedly going to be the first country manager for (not audible) but it never transpired. She seemed to just come in and fizzled nothing happened with her. So I was like no this cannot be right. So I started investigating what is it that I needed to do get myself more exposed you know. Regional office was at that time in Johannesburg working a lot with product lines and senior management. at one point they wanted to me to go back to Angola and said no I have been there done that. I want to do something more into management that is in business environment. I had a very good opportunity the then vice president for sub-Saharan Africa had heard a lot about me and came to Kenya and we all had to do presentations. He liked what I did and felt I really understood the market and asked if I could meet him and his team and it was then that he offered me the job so I think they had it in their mind to come into. They gave me the country manager for Kenya and within less than 6 months I was given the whole of eastern Africa. I was given the east Africa role the time when the market was terrible when East Africa was not doing well with comparison and the company was trying to shut down the eastern Africa operations. So I said no let me go buy sometime. We had a lot of assets in the region. i said look I am going to clean up the region, I am going to make the lean operations headquarter everything in Kenya you know bring all the critical mass here and then will be targeting operations here within east Africa if need be. I quietly did that and managed to achieve my goals and came up with a very clean operation and everybody was very surprised. Around 2016 we saw a little bit of an increase and I will say for me it was Mozambique so it was a bit (not audible) for me. We managed to get a big contract in Mozambique and nobody expected us to do that. So there was a service that would a bit of breathing space when no revenue was coming in and of course in the mean time I got married so my husband was based in the US so I have gotten content with long distance fiancée during all this time, a long distance marriage then now I am running a huge operation and celebrate the first woman that was not African, first woman running a major operation in the country especially sub-Sahara Africa and I thought well it is not going to stop here. I want to make it to director and eventually vice president of the region and I did not know this is what I would like to do, what I need to do. so I worked very hard getting contracts, attending conferences and doing what we could in a very difficult environment and at times I felt maybe if I were in a bigger more lucrative area, maybe things would be faster for me than where I was. The company then decided that they want to really consolidate sub-Sahara Africa and at that time I started really questioning what is it that I wanted to do and at some point I could see I may have to go back to the US which was not a bad thing but I felt that if I leave Kenya then what have I left behind you know there is no one I could see around previously there was a lady who was Nigerian who was country manager and she left and no woman come after so you saw the usual faces you know and I started interacting with the university and then took over USP chair for USP it was then that I realized that not only as woman but also in Africa that I was able to do something to show that people who have been in this business and how can we encourage the younger group so I remember talking to my husband this game that we not really together since he is staying in US so I want to start doing something on my own he looked at me and asked are you sure I said yes this the only way to approach company let me start a business together with the company but it did seem to fit the objectives. I would cut down the operation and in the beginning it was this good content going on and have been very active in local content as we extract more and to be a voice of, let’s be realistic when I went through what I was I was in this business for almost 19 years there was no local content so had moved here and people look at you, you are a woman and black and you had to find a way to propel my point was if I talk of local content you will be very realistic about what’s being done and train the same in the younger generation this may be fascinating than during my time but how could we make it because we work with people who really don’t understand the business .So they then decided to merge eastern Africa into central Africa to make it one region and that’s the time I thought it was okay its either it’s my calling or I decide to do my business or an heading back to US so when I tell people this they laugh and practically I had a dream and finally made that decision and dream I was going to start something and next day I went to offices and I said I don’t need company all I want is start working on paper work so that was basically on June so July 2017 …(name withheld) was offering services and I had map on how … was going to be company with same objectives I have been working on in my previous company .I saw my provision has been companied by, what have been trying to do my whole company in verbal business and there was a big local content so when I opened my door the first people I saw were two interns ,myself and two directors who live overseas so it was basically the two directors and my husband and we started working on a big tender in Uganda and that was the challenge because at that time I never had strategic plan and people in company to put things together and we thought you still working or you need a break, honestly. I never took a break when from one job to another and am now one year three months it has been challenging, exciting it has taught me a lot about myself I still wake up every morning surprised that am doing what am doing and as a woman very proud that am sticking with it and very proud of it and made sure have put organization in a order built in principal , built in to teach young basically have been young in the other office , in mean time in this conferences local content not just in Kenya internationally it has really exposed me surprisingly have got lot of men who come to me very proud and tell me we proud of you because will be able to point you when telling our daughters if she can do it you can do it, so there is that satisfaction but am always proving myself in many ways . I don’t believe what men say they believe in boys club there is no woman club, association of woman in NGO so it is very nice to come across this group to see woman in different sectors we do have (name withheld) in production I was able to meet mechanical or civil engineer who graduated long before we did and to realized nothing changed in their time and in our time we still pushing still mental or normally in our industries . I would like to say have made a big impact on where am able to show what am able to show. One of the things I would like say in my internship program is they really reach out to woman but I find young women are not aggressive like men so anytime I get a chance ladies just knock on my door and male counter parts they will just approach you in different. Ways , don’t wait to be 100% qualified for job go look for things which are challenging look for people even boss that will challenge you and show interest at because a bad boss can ruin things for you look for company that will help you grow doesn’t mean the big company if you go to states you find people working for small companies when we had global a lot of people lost jobs and people went for small company or started and they have made a fantastic contribution in careers so my hope in … as a company and we have built very strong partners with has enabled us to build confidently with good partners with cooperation with upcoming development work in the region. In the month. I am where I am because some men believed in me. Yes, because women make up more than 50%, so you’re missing out on a whole group that could come in and turn the industry around. Again, as I said, I think most women don’t really understand the industry. I did this talk to some young achievers in high school, the first thing they told me was “Ms. we are very interested in what you're doing but we don’t want to get our hands dirty, so we don’t think we want to go into this industry, we just want to sit in an office” and, I was shocked, I was like some of my best jobs have been in the field. When you sit in office it takes long to get results but in the field the results are right there. When you leave an operation you know whether it is successful or not, about 99% of the time. So for me its like a drug. The field has a drug because you're doing everything, everything can be quite exciting. If you make a mistake you’ll know it right away. So again lack of these young girls really understanding what is out there and these are really bad girls. So I’ve actually been asked to come back and talk to them and hopefully mentor some of them who’ll show some interest in the extractive industry.

**Interviewer**: And do you think that is an issue with the way the society is structured?

**Respondent**: I think it’s a combination. Yeah, I think society makes a difference. They’re some people -------If we look at let’s say, the Kenyan context or the African context, I think society plays a much bigger role in terms of can women do engineering jobs and stuff like that. It’s changing, but in the states no. My experience, I don’t think it’s a matter of women are not in engineering because your dad doesn’t think it’s right or society thinks it’s more of a man’s job or you’re scared to do it. It’s just the choice that people make. Okay I don’t know if I have answered your question.

**Interviewer**: oh yes you have. And then if you could just give a recommendation what would you give or what would you like government or companies to do to encourage women to do extractives?

**Respondent**: well I think they need to actively, first of all they need to actively go out and look for these young ladies and maybe in some cases pay more attention. Let them have mentors and you know how do I say? Kind of break them in, I think really it’s just….you know sometime I really worry if I sound like what our parents used to sound like. This is how things were for me so anyone can go through it, you know what I mean. You know I think I worked much harder than maybe some other folks. so for me I always think that if you really want something you’ll find a way to do it even as a woman you know and that’s just my opinion. I’m not advocating that companies go out and make it overly simplified because it’s for a woman. But I think just education if we can start at the prime new level to encourage. Let girls know that, hey a lot of women that are doing extractive jobs. Because they don’t see people like us doing what we do. I think if more girls see that I don’t think that really they would go out and do what they would do for anybody else that’s just my opinion and its going to take time and again it comes back to the oldest folks. Those of us who are already in the industry what is it that we are doing? I would say in Kenya those of us that are in industry I think we are doing a lot of….mention people like engineer (name withheld) with her mentorship program and she is a tallow she grew up in the production engineering that’s the senior production engineer and you know tallow have show cased. You go to KENGEN you’ll seen some very good women engineers as well as others that have come out. I think that in my particular area there must be more office service more than the contractor’s side. I don’t think we really have time to be thinking about that we are just there to get jobs. I think on the office services side some companies have done extremely well. If you look at companies like …. they are doing very well it’s a mandate that they have to really bring in women, to make sure women are not fast tracked but you know to get the right women and able to progress these women I think more so than other companies. So there was a discussion on where women have done extremely well and that to me is something that I’m really complaisant about and I ask what part what related part can I play in this recreation. It’s important. Think of it as long as all of us do our stuff it won’t become an issue one day. It’s just that if you don’t see the numbers is because the women are not interested for a number of reasons. Then towards the end I think we need to think of how do retain the retention. I think that’s an area a lot of people tend to forget and they think okay we will bring them in. And I’ve seen a lot of good engineers leave the industry because they are frustrated, they just feel that as I said that those who are mothers, those taking care of sick, of elderly parents and you know we come with our own issues that I think that a man may not necessary understand in the work place. I think we forget about retention we talk about bringing women in and forget how to make sure we retain them and let them progress.

**Interviewer:** So where do you see yourself in the next 10years?

**Respondent**: A good question. Very good question. Obviously I would like my company to grow and if I have to hand it over to someone else to take the rates I would be more than happy to do that and then maybe look at something very different. Really think about farming, flowers, there is something that I’ve always loved going into flower farm. My mother is a large scale farmer so its kind of in the blood and antics, I love antics. So you know, I hope that in ten years time I can relax a little bit and kind of take time, take time for myself. Yeah. Take time for family and take time for myself and feel that I’ve left something, I’ve left a mark I would be happy.

**Interviewer**: Wow.

**Respondent**: Yes.

**Interviewer**: I hope to see you in ten years (laughing).

**Respondent:** Yes! Before then you’ll be a doctor and I will be very proud, you don’t have to be in the extractive industry for me not to be proud when I see women you know women exceling even in what you are doing not many women are doing either.

**Interviewer:** Yes that’s true. I would have loved to be an engineer but I’m not very good with math. (laughing)

**Respondent:** Well a lot of people say that (laughing).

**Interviewer**: Well like if you going to university in Kenya that’s the first thing they ask.

**Respondent**: Well you see the good thing and I tell people in the oil industry is that we don’t have to be all engineers, yes, you know a lot of people that live from it are not engineers luckily enough in the field they allow you to come in and gain experience. A lot of things have changed once they want the qualification and all that but you can still pay a big role and I think you doing that by being able to show case some of the things that women go through. Because usually when you talk about South Africa or Kenya we tend to look at the women we tend to look at what would I say we tend to look at the marginalized woman women being marginalized the low income women. And we don’t maybe look at the professional women and what role they are playing and a lot of times its done very quietly. So I get surprised when a lot of people tell me that I never knew you existed. (laughing)

**Interviewer**: Yes it’s true.

**Respondent:** So as somebody who is in business development I’m not a good job if you don’t know but you know as I said I’m busy trying to grow a good business and I can’t always be up there. But I’m very fortunate because of the work I said I’m called to speak and I’m very honored people get to know me and write in and support me. As I was telling you I won an award a Kenyan award it’s my first award here as a future leader in oil and gas, I don’t know if you know (name withheld). There was an oil and gas that was done upstream award that was done in I think was it April and I was the first recipient. So to me it’s an honor that even my own people are honoring and seeing the work that I have done. Yeah… cause quite a lot of them knew me from when I worked in corporate America, you know, but to be very honest when I’m doing that I don’t have the corporate salary. To me I’m just staging my life and this is very satisfying because you wake up every morning and you not sure you determine your path. I like that, your path is not determined for you and also I have a lot of people that are looking up to me as to guide them so for me it is actually a privilege and a joy.

**Interviewer**: And it is my privilege too interviewing you (laughing)

**Respondent:** Yes thank you. I’ve I answered everything to you?

**Interviewer:** Yes you have given me more than I required.

**Respondent:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** So thank you.

**Respondent**: I would be more than happy if you need someone else I have another Kenyan engineer, she is actually now based in Paris so I could give you that off the record and you can contact her.