

Oil & gas: council for skills development takes shape

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Education ministry permanent secretary Alex Kakooza (R) congratulates Rossini Silveira after being elected chairperson of the oil and gas sector skills council

As Uganda prepares to produce its first drop of oil in 2023, a 13-man council has been inaugurated to lead skills development for the industry. The council, comprising mainly employers in the oil and gas sector, will provide a forum where any issues for the oil and gas supply chain can be discussed by different stakeholders, writes YUDAYA NANGONZI.

Uganda has confirmed 6.5 billion barrels of oil and between 1.4 and 1.7 billion barrels are thought to be recoverable – the proportion of resources that can be technically, economically and legally extracted.

While presiding over the inauguration ceremony, Alex Kakooza, the Education ministry's permanent secretary, said the council will, among other things, streamline skills with emphasis on demand-driven rather than supply-driven training.

"We are now moving into competence-based training...If we are to get competencies that the industry requires, then the industry must take part in training and development of the oil and gas curriculum," he said.

Kakooza was speaking at the coordination office for the skills development projects at Rwenzori Courts last week. He added that an orientation workshop will be organised soon to take the council members through what is required of them as far as technical and vocational education and training (TVET) reforms are concerned.

At the function, members unanimously elected the representative of the Society of Petroleum Engineers Uganda Limited, Rossini Silveira, as their chairperson. Silveira, an engineer by profession, replaces Alex Asiimwe from the ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) who steered the first council from 2015 to 2018. The second council will also serve for a period of three years.

Other members who took oath are: Dr George Owor, who represents universities offering oil and gas training, Grace Bambeera from Total E&P, Ewen Fraser for international oil and gas companies, Justine Odong for public institutions offering oil and gas, Alex Asiimwe for MGLSD and David Mubiru Luyima from the Education ministry.

Honey Malinga will represent the ministry of Energy and Mineral Development while Betty Jackie Namubiru sits in for the Petroleum Authority of Uganda. John B. Habumugisha will represent the Uganda National Oil Company and Patrick Mbonye represents private institutions offering oil and gas training.

The major goals of the council are to improve the match between demand and supply in the labour market, productivity, business and sector performance, increase opportunities to boost the skills in the sector's workforce and improve supply through National Occupational Standards/competency framework and apprenticeships.

Some members of the council will soon sit on a bursary scheme task force to approve beneficiaries of the Albertine Region Sustainable Development Project (ARSDP) where at least 600 trainees from 13 districts in the Albertine region will be selected for skills training from accredited public and private institutions.

In the interim, members will hold quarterly meetings and report to Kakooza as government concludes the process of establishing a fully-fledged TVET council where sector skills councils report to.

Loy Muhwezi, the head of the TVET policy reform secretariat, said the council has come at the right time when the country needs employers who are well-versed with the requisite skills for oil and gas.

“When employers are leading, they guide institutions appropriately. For a council like oil and gas, they will also not go into the government bureaucracy; they can agree to work even on weekends or public holidays because they are used to routine because at the end of the day they are looking at their productivity and competitiveness,” Muhwezi said.

She added that if employers don’t lead the skills agenda, they will pay the price of recruiting incompetent people, thus spending more resources on training staff. In the next few months, she said, government will also inaugurate councils for the agriculture, construction, manufacturing and tourism and hospitality sectors because nominations are ongoing.

Last month, Uganda unveiled five blocks for the second competitive licensing for oil and gas exploration in the country. The blocks are Avivi covering an area of 1,026 square kilometers, Omuka with 750 square kilometers, Kasurubani covers 1,285 square kilometers, Turaco stretching 637 square kilometers and Ngaji block covering 1,230 square kilometers.

There is hope that when these areas are explored, Uganda will discover more oil.

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