

Keynote Address Delivered at the HerWorld Energy Forum, themed “The Next Era of Energy: Lean In. All In. Join In”. – Nairobi Kenya on 8th March 2017 by Eke U. Eke - Chairman & CEO of SpringRock Group

BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH THROUGH DIVERSITY AND LEADERSHIP

I would like to thank the organizers of this forum for inviting me to speak at this forum. When I first got the invitation and I noticed that the forum was being organized by Pink Petrol and Woman in Energy and Extractives WEX my first reaction was this must be a gathering of women, so why are they inviting a man? On a second thought I said to myself, since my mother has passed away and she is not able to attend this women’s gathering, perhaps I was being invited to represent my mum and to support the forum. Hence, I accepted the invitation and I am very glad to be here and be a part of the activities in this forum.

Three gentlemen were hiking on a forest area along the bank of a river and after a while they decided that they wanted to cross to the other side of the river. The first man prayed to God to give him strength to be able to swim across the river. And after his prayers God answered him and his muscle grew and he swam across the river in 3 hours. Then the second man prayed to God to give him strength, tools and techniques which we can use to cross the river. After his prayer, he was able to build a boat and 1 hour later he crossed to the other side. Then the third man prayed to God to give him strength, tools, techniques and wisdom to cross the river. His prayer was also answered and he was turned into a woman. She looked into her hand bag and found a map which showed that there was a bridge up ahead and she walked uphill and took the bridge and 5 minutes later she crossed to the other side.

Continuing I would like to thank Pink Petrol and Woman in Energy and Extractives WEX for putting together this forum and for encouraging more women to be a part of the oil and gas industry. Currently, with the growing challenges associated with more difficult to find hydrocarbons, escalating cost of extraction, growing environmental concerns, need to preserve the planet etc. this is a time that the industry would rather cross the river in 5 minutes than take 3 hours through the use of brute force.

Here in Kenya and in several other countries that are relatively young in the Oil and Gas domain there are a number of unique features which may not be at play in other more matured oil provinces. The technical challenges are the same regardless of where one is. However, other challenges may be different. A few of those peculiar challenges are identified as

- Existence of a very small pool of Human Capital with the right level of technical expertise
- Absence of operating models that have been previously testing in the same environment to follow.

One can go on to list several other challenges; however, my talk would focus only on these two. So, the obvious question is how do we approach these unique challenges?

Diversity as a driver for organizational strength

The challenge of human capital I must highlight exists also in the most matured oil and gas provinces, however it is further exacerbated in a new province. There are a number of ways we

can work to address this. While, I don't intend to dwell on building of technical work force as a subject I would like to laser into a specific aspect of building work force which is diversity.

Diversity as we know has many dimensions. In most countries, there are two dimensions of diversity and in Africa you can add a third. The two that are universal is gender and nationality dimension and the third which is mostly manifested in Africa is ethnicity. We know that the world had slightly more women than men and if that distribution is like Kenya then Kenya would also have more women than men. Hence any effort being directed at building human technical capacity for the industry must have a specific focus on attracting the gender that represents more than half the work force.

One can further ask why do we need to focus on gender diversity? In my mind the answer is two folds. The first being that it enables us to attract more than half of the potential workforce available into the industry and secondly and more importantly it is to enable us harness the unique qualities that woman bring to the workforce and some of these are

- Ability to multi-task
- Problem solving skills (most at times without resulting to the scotched earth methods that men are familiar with)
- Networking
- permit me to also add that they bring smiles into the work place.

Nevertheless, bringing women into the workplace in the oil and gas industry requires specific effort by the corporate bodies and by women themselves since historically the industry has been a man's world.

I would start by first examining what the corporate bodies should do to enable them to rapidly build on a workforce with adequate representation of the female population

Corporations would need to

- Set an objective on how many women they aspire to have in their work force. If I was to prescribe I would state that 50% females in Shore and Office based population is a good start from the onset.
- Actively recruit females – In doing this, the screening process must remain robust and filter out unqualified persons
- Take risk with the females – Give them opportunity to bring their abilities to the fore. Challenge them to contribute to or design some of the processes and procedures they were going to work with themselves from the scratch, of course with support as would be needed.
- The organizations should support and mentor them while monitoring progress. And encourage the senior females in the organization to mentor the younger ones.
- Organizations should be bold to take what I would call “None Obvious Actions” – This include amongst others actions like promoting the outstanding ones earlier on in their career to create role models for the females. Do not be afraid to do this, bear in in mind that the *“unusual is better than the incompetent”*.

Secondly, as I stated earlier there is a role to be played by the females themselves. So, what should the females do

- I encourage them, to go out there and seek to be a part of the industry – I believe Pink Petrol and Woman in Energy and Extractives WEX is taking a leading role in supporting this and forums like this is a step in the right direction
- There is a Nigerian Music that says “Do you know your selling point?”; “What is your selling point?”, “Identify your selling point”. And nothing captures better the second step women needs to take than that song. So, you need to define for yourself what is your strength and how do you want to bring that to bear and contribute positively to the organization.
- Thirdly you have to be curious. Be hungry for knowledge, push to learn, push to expand your horizon and that way with your unique natural abilities you can begin to contribute much earlier than your male counterparts.
- Apply the unique abilities of women which we earlier highlighted which is multi-tasking, networking and problem solving.
- Seek out role models and mentors to support you while you aspire to be like them and surpass them
- It is particularly important that the females who have progressed mentor the younger ones.

Please permit me to add that I currently lead an organization that set as one of its founding personnel management goals to have 50% of all positions that are shore and office based occupied by females. So far we have done very well and 2 years into operation the organization has surpassed 40% being females with outstanding results. And we hope to exceed 50% before our 4th year of operations anniversary.

Lastly, I would add that there are several studies on the positive impact and results the inclusion of more women in a team brings to the performance of the team. Harvard Business Review has written several cover publications on this and our experience at SpringRock Group agrees and supports the findings of these studies. What I shared with you is our practical experience and SpringRock Group is proud to be a leader in this direction.

Leadership required to evolve novel operating models and adapt them more rapidly

The second area of focus of my talk is the absence of already tested operating models that have been used here in Kenya or in any other young oil and gas province. This calls for finding new ways to rapidly enable new players in Kenya to become matured participants in the Oil and gas domain within a short time. Perhaps I am being futuristic here as I understand there are presently no active Kenyan Independent Exploration and Production Operating Companies. Well we must challenge the status quo if we are to advance, so I believe it is still apt to talk about what should be done when hopefully in a few months from now Kenyan companies become players in the Exploration and Production play in their own country.

The traditional way for new independents oil companies entering the oil and gas domain is to spend several years to build an organization with certain level of technical expertise before it can commence the monetization of its assets. These results in a significant lag time between acquisition of asset and its monetization. This lag has been seen in most acreages that have been acquired by African Independent, across Africa and notably in Nigeria.

Not too long from now I predict that a growing number of Kenyan Entrepreneurs and Organizations would venture into the Oil and Gas fray. These new African Independent oil companies do not need to take the same old road already taken time and again in the past decades.

However, taking a different path requires leadership to lead. In leadership I am referring to the persons who are or will be at the helm of affairs of these organizations. Through the right leadership the new players can move directly into monetizing their assets while at the same time developing their organization in tandem. This they can achieve by partnering with a well horned African technical organization and begin executing project at international standards in a very short space of time. And as a part of the partnership this organization would also support the development of their organization's human capacity requirement while monetizing their assets.

These new tracks provide them the ability to do the following

- Retain reasonable control of the decision making and involvement in the project execution

- Enable their team to work side by side with a team of experts with a defined goal to build on the operator's expertise over time.

- Deliver projects with technical, safety and financial objectives met.

- Engage in multiple projects at once or provide the ability to carry out projects back to back.

So, I call on my Kenyan friends and all those in several other new oil and gas provinces to not follow the traditional path but rather short-circuit the processes through alignment of interest with existing organizations with execution capabilities. With the right leadership and the leadership choosing to lead in a new direction these can be achieved.

We have recently put together an African Organization that is technically robust and is partnering with Nigerian Independents in monetizing their assets at a fast space with superior results. While SpringRock Group is one of such partners, it must be us. However, we are available to work with you shoulder to shoulder should you elect to do so.

Ladies and Gentleman, even though I initially thought that being a man, I should not have been invited to a forum like this, however today I am glad I was invited. I have shared with you some of my thoughts on the challenges that faces a new or young oil and gas provinces like Kenya. In doing so I tried to also give you my views on what can be done to address these challenges. I touched on the use of a gender diversity as a driver to building organization strength. This would enable us not only attract women into the Oil and Gas Industry but most importantly enable the industry gain on the unique qualities and strength of females at this challenging time when new ideas and new ways of doing things are very highly needed.

I also outlined my views on the role leadership should play in fostering new business cooperation that can enable younger player in the industry become matured participants in a very short time. This calls for partnering with well horned technical organizations to provide a leapfrog of capabilities.

Ladies and Gentleman in closing I note that the theme of this forum is "The Next Era of Energy: Lean In, All In, Join In. I hope I have succeeded in showing you ways in which we can lean in, join in and have all in as well as highlighted again the extraordinary gain that would be made in bringing more women into the oil and gas play.

Thank you very much.