

A winning step in gender equality: Female SMME selected to join Energy Sector Gender Ministerial Advisory Council

By [Kelly Sin Hidge](#), issued by [SAICA](#)

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Driven small business owner **Devaksha Maharaj**, shares her story on how she was selected to join the **Energy Sector Gender Ministerial Advisory Council** earlier this year as part of the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Strategy implementation plan.



About Devaksha Maharaj

Devaksha Maharaj is the owner of Ikigai Engineering, a multi-faceted consultancy dealing in energy management advisory services including, measurement and verification as well as installation and maintenance in the electrical and renewable energy sectors. Furthermore, they also offer training and capacity building and have a national footprint with offices in KZN and the Free State.

Devaksha is a current beneficiary on the **EneGro Programme 2021 at Saica Enterprise Development** (Saica ED) in partnership with Avon and Dedisa Peaking Power. The Saica ED programme is tailor-made to empower and equip SMME owners, like Devaksha, with financial and industry related expertise. When asking Devaksha what she most enjoys about being part of the programme she says, "I enjoy the technical mentoring sessions with my mentor from the CSIR. He has a range of experience and together we have good interactions where we exchange ideas."

"The energy sector in South Africa has a massive role to play not only in context of our countries energy and economic sustainability, but also in context of equality - economic, ethnic and gender. Women have so much to offer and when we partner with each other – male and female, and people of all ethnicities. Our diversity of skills makes for a combination of unstoppable potential," says Saica ED Customised Projects Manager, Darren Ryder.

Selected to join the prestigious Sector Gender Ministerial Advisory Council

Devaksha shared with us that "The Minister has recently approved the **Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Strategy** implementation plan which will be established as an implemented initiative by the Gender Ministerial Advisory Council for the Energy Sector."

The **Energy Sector Gender Ministerial Advisory Council's** purpose is to provide strategic and technical support and advice the Minister and his Executive on the implementation of Energy Sector WEGE Strategy. Being part of the Council board, Devaksha will be part of the team who will report on national sectoral and implementation progress.

A personal journey of woman empowerment

We asked Devaksha if woman empowerment has always been a passion project and she noted, "Yes being part of a male-dominated sector since my tertiary education days it has become natural that living for woman empowerment embodied my very being." She also added that her passion to even start her very own company and be her own boss was partially due to a gender-based victimisation case at her previous employer. From strength-to-strength Devaksha used her grit and courageous attitude to rise and transition into a new world as a SMME. "After my resignation I decided to open up my

consultancy as I knew that I had the skills and knowledge to take the same value-add that I had in the corporate world to run my own company,” says Devaksha.

In a comment on being a women entrepreneur in the energy space she comments, “Women have to put in a little more extra work to prove ourselves especially those who are black female and own their own businesses. I am worthy of my skills and qualifications. We are not given the same opportunities as men when it comes to finances, decision-making, research, policy and community involvement. There’s always a situation of unconscious bias which we must be aware of and make others aware of as well.”

In closing, Saica Enterprise Development wishes to congratulate Devaksha on her journey as part of the Advisory council and applaud her on her efforts to bring gender equality in the Energy Sector. We also commend her commitment on the EneGro programme, taking her business to new heights. A few concluding words and advice to fellow SMME’s in the sector would be, “to be confident and committed in the decisions you make. Follow through with anything you embark on with integrity and professionalism. Embrace the downfalls and forge ahead. Two steps everyday will lead to a path of success.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Sin Hidge is from Saica Enterprise Development.

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