

by Robert Mandeya

Women and Safety in the LPG Industry in Zimbabwe

With the rise in the consumption of LPG energy in the households, women in Zimbabwe have become the biggest users of LPG for cooking yet they are generally not involved in the LPG supply chain safety programmes. Traditionally, many women's income-generating activities in Zimbabwe such as food processing, depended on their labour and thermal energy, therefore, the introduction of LPG in Zimbabwe as an alternative source of energy must be equally matched with increased safety consciousness among the most group of users of this vital energy.

Used correctly, LPG is one of the safest, cleanest and most sustainable energy sources currently available, yet issues of safety in the consumption of this vital source of energy by this critical group (women) of our population has not been seriously considered. Women and Safety concerns are some of the most important issues LPGSAZ seeks to address in the LPG industry. The issue of women and access to modern energy services is real. Therefore a focus on energy and women's health is critical for reducing domestic accidents, child mortality and improving maternal health in a tangible, scalable, and sustainable way. One of the many ways we can meet the national target of providing safe, clean and reliable access to alternative energy is transitioning to domestic and industrial safe use of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG).

Furthermore, LPG produces none of the smoke and soot that can damage the lungs of families as that faced when using coal or wood. Therefore, safety issues, related to the consumption of LPG need to be addressed head on for the sake of women who have become the greatest consumers of LPG energy in the households. That means operators in the LPG industry must make women and safety a strategic priority if they want to promote safe, sustainable consumption of the LPG and in turn attract profitability. LPG penetration for Zimbabwe households now sits at about 10% and this is set to increase given the growing demand for LPG due to urban residential expansion, shortage of thermal energy and rise in environmental protection concerns. However, the gender gap in the safety profession appears to be wider as few women are involved in the design and roll out safety programs particularly in the LPG industry.

If players in the LPG industry want to truly address issues of safety in the consumption of LPG and enjoy the benefits of increased use of this alternative energy, then they must make sure they are including women in safety programmes as to promote confidence and encourage proper use of LPG in the households and industry. At the same time, approaching safety from a gender point of view will bring a different perspective from the women side of things which will enrich efforts in dealing with safety issues in the industry.

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