

My experience as a woman loggie

By Eva Ntege Dhizaala

My name is Eva Ntege Dhizaala, a black Ugandan national, a woman by gender. I have been in the logistics world since 18 years to date. It has been a very interesting journey especially given my gender, color and nationality; and I feel privileged to share it out and indeed hope that it will be an inspiration to others starting out.



It was not easy in the beginning, rejections, being despised and doubted, but now it is all worth it.

My 18 years' journey as a woman logistician has been one full of very wonderful moments and several low ones in different parts of the world; Southern Sudan, North Western Kenya, Sri Lanka, Liberia, Indonesia, Khartoum.

Before my professional life as a Logistician, I can link my logistics background to my family background where my Father, Mr. Edward Ntege was a great motor sports enthusiast in Uganda having participated in the late 60s in the then East African Safari Rally and thereafter organized motor sports events in Uganda. I gained an interest and in the late 80s and 90s actively participated as very few of the women then in motor sport in Uganda. As a result of my active participation in motor sports, I gained a lot of confidence in self and, also an ability to relate in a male dominated setting.

I entered the professional logistics world in 1990 where I started out as an assistant in a European headed logistic company based in Uganda named LOGISERV. It existed during the years of OLS (Operation Lifeline Sudan) and was contracted among other INGOs mainly by WFP (World Food Program) to supply and support UN program in Sudan. I had a very wonderful boss, Eric Frerotte' a very experienced logistician. Eric gave me a first-hand education in logistics, allowed me to make mistakes, and above all, he strengthened the confidence in me that with hard work and a good plan, anyone could make it. He continuously told me that I could make a good logistician given the way I handled my work and managed the clients who were mostly male drivers from different parts of East Africa and the INGO representatives that were mostly foreigners from different parts of the world. One core principle that I developed from his instruction is "stand up for your self" and do not take any nonsense form any one. As a woman logistician, I have been through so many hard and pressuring job situations, but I am proud to say I have always stood up for myself.

Serving in a traditionally male dominated job has been very challenging, both from the male counter-parts and even from female colleagues. In the early years

of my career, I perceived that men found it amusing during the interviews I was short listed to; I was judged as being 'at the wrong place at the wrong time' as they assumed that I would be unable to stand to the pressures of the task. Indeed in the early years, all the jobs I was appointed to was because I stood my ground and took the interview panelists to task to give me a chance and if they found me lacking, then I could then take the sack! I have become assured of the fact that when one is sure of the product they are marketing then one can afford to bait. I am a proof as I have never got the sack out of inadequacy on my part. I have however learned, especially as a woman loggie that one must always learn to measure the situation and call it quits at certain points in life's varying situations.

I have also succeeded in my life as a Logistician because of some fellow women who have been of inspiration to me. My Mother, Deborah 'Mameya', with no formal school education but a very great educator of life, a woman of wisdom and to me a great Logistician, has been a great inspiration. She taught me that I could be what I wanted if I tried hard enough, not to care about detractors. There have been female colleagues in the professional logistics field who have tested the waters, and who have been of great inspiration especially during the moments of uncertainty in my work life. Here I would like to mention Mrs. Pamela Steele, a woman who echoed that a woman could do anything that there is to be done and do it well, plus that one should not listen to the despising "macho" cowardly men who are threatened by a woman's super performance. These men do not want to give us credit for the good work we do but keep telling us that we are not up to the job requirements or standards. As a result of looking up to a woman like Pamela who has gone up the ladder in the logistics life, plus encouragement from her likes, I have learnt to stand up for my rights and demand to be respected as a woman logistician. People like Pamela have also instilled in me the importance of doing a job, and giving it my best in such a way that no one can say otherwise.

I have to confess I also had a lot of discouragement from some other women colleagues. Women who have in some instances had the 'macho man' mentality towards me and imagined I could not make it or worse still, who did not understand the strategic relevance and importance of logistics in operations. I would say to any lady coming up in this field not to allow your fellow woman to make you lose your goal because thankfully, at the end of the day, when I excelled at what I set out to do, the very women felt proud to have a fellow 'succeeding' woman in charge of a successful logs team!

I have a situation from my work experience I would like to narrate that exemplifies some of my experiences. There was a time I was set up by male colleagues to a place I was posted to even before I reported for duty in that station. Word had gone ahead from my prior posting of my 'character' that I was a very strict, no nonsense woman (characteristics I was happy to be associated with!) and that they must be ready to get the sack once I get to their duty station

if they did not find away of making me fail! I have learnt not to assume that every duty station is the same and all people are the same. No, it does not work that way. One has to leave space for surprise and frustration and definitely always expect new challenges. When I arrived at the mentioned duty station, I indeed got a lot of non-cooperation from my colleagues and was highly frustrated. I stood my ground and I was happy in the end that they actually confessed to me of their planned acts for my failure. To my amusement, they informed me to my face that indeed to their surprise I was not what they had been told I was like. My style of work is clarity in duty and responsibility to my juniors. I make sure that they clearly know what they are supposed to do and I support them, but demand of them to be committed and dedicated to their duties and to be accountable for their actions. As a matter of fact these same colleagues were sad to see me go at the end of my contract because of my work style and wanted me to extend!

It has been a very amazing journey as woman logistician, especially with my bosses; male or female. Interestingly the most enriching and challenging have been with fellow women. I would like to advise upcoming loggies to always be professional, whether with female or male colleagues. Learn to separate work and leisure and I tell you one has to stand firm on this issue.

It would not have been easy if my loving husband was not the great supportive person he has been and is in my last five years as an international woman logistician. Especially for an African woman married to an African man, it would have been an 'either work or my marriage kind of decision', but this has never been so. I am always grateful to my husband Tonny James Dhizaala, who has always been there for me in all the good and especially hard moments. In a kind of 'prenuptial' style, before we wedded, we agreed that I could take on any job in any location even if it was unaccompanied. God took us on the challenge, Tonny would sometimes stay at home and I would be off in the next moment gone for months to God knows where, but he never changed his mind although I know there has been pressure from relatives and he also must have had moments when he really missed me and questioned the decision, but all the same he still stood by what we decided. A supportive spouse is very important as I have seen many woman logisticians turn down assignments because their partners did not support it. But my husband has on many occasions, asked leave without pay or sabbatical leave to come with me on my assignments that were accompanied or even to come visit for a couple of weeks. I thank God for my husband.

I am a Christian and having Christ as my Personal Friend has helped me through thick and thin. I have worked in almost all parts of the world, met so many amazing people, made friends, been given many names and presents, all thanks to my God. It has been a time of discovering the world and people, such an enriching time for me and my husband, but also very challenging. If you ask me whether I still want to do this job, I would straight forwardly say YES!