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Effective Opportunities for Gender Equality, Career Advancement, and Knowledge Building: Serving as a Chief Scientific Investigator

Opportunities within technical fields may seem limited for women, particularly in specialized areas such as nuclear security. There may be real or perceived barriers to career advancement, specifically in opportunities for women to exercise project or team management leadership, build important networks, and expand and demonstrate technical skills. This paper will discuss serving as a Chief Scientific Investigator of a research project as a very real mechanism to effectively address gender equality issues and to build capacity within Member States.

The IAEA encourages and assists research on, development of, and practical use of atomic energy and its applications for peaceful purposes throughout the world. It brings together research institutions from Member States to collaborate on research projects of common interest through Coordinated Research Projects (CRPs). For each project, participating institutes designate one staff member as the Chief Scientific Investigator (CSI) to manage the research project.. The IAEA acts as the sponsoring and coordinating body; and an IAEA technical staff member is assigned to lead each CRP as the project officer.

A wide range of CRP activities yield diverse outputs, which include:
• Establishment of networks and databases;
• Development of tools to improve Front Line Officer performance effectiveness; and
• Development of devices or tools for equipment diagnosis and testing.

Sri Lanka has participated in many IAEA CRPs and I serve as the CSI for the CRP on Improved Assessment of Initial Alarms from Radiation Detection Equipment. This experience has greatly enhanced my technical acumen, project management skills, and leadership abilities. I will share how I have been able to lead a team, develop a network, and build my confidence.

The CSI role has also given me the opportunity to assist other Member States in the development and implementation of radiation detection strategies. For example, I led an expert mission to Cambodia to collect data and lead the development of a site-specific tool to improve consistency, accuracy, and efficiency of alarm assessments using the Tool for Radiation Alarm and Commodity Evaluation (TRACE). I have also participated in IAEA technical meetings to further my understanding of testing processes for radiation detection equipment. As a CSI I have benefited from mentorship and technical collaboration with the IAEA Project Officer. As a result, I have further developed my career while increasing effectiveness and sustainability of nuclear security detection activities in Sri Lanka.

As a woman, scientist, and nuclear security professional, I encourage women interested in enhancing their own and their State's capabilities to participate in a relevant Coordinated Research Project.

Gender

Female

State

Sri Lanka

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