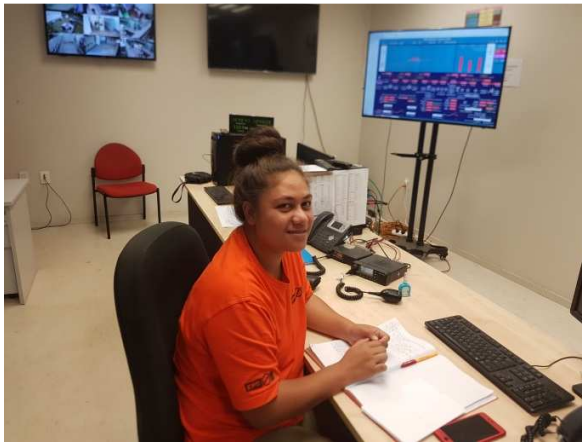


## Interview with Christine Ah Ching, System Controller at EPC

Christine Ah Ching works as a System Controller with the Electric Power Corporation (EPC). She works at the National Control Center and she is the lone female amongst a team of 4 System Controllers and 12 assistants. System Controllers are required to control and monitor all of EPC generating stations using its SCADA network. It is a highly technical role which has always been fulfilled by men in the past. Christine has a Diploma in Advance Computer Science and is a graduate of the National University of Samoa. She is 22 years of ages



1. *How did you end up in this position?*

- Well I was looking through the Public Service Commission Circular one day and I saw this position in it. Its main criteria were computer skills which I have, so I ended up applying for it. I didn't think I would get the job but hey God works in mysterious way and here I am.

2. *When did you decide that this is something that you might be interested in?*

- In the beginning I wasn't confident enough that I could do this, since I had little understanding about electricity and all, but now that I have some work experience and starting to get familiar with the job I want to learn more especially utilising my knowledge from the course I studied.

3. *How do you feel about working in an environment dominated by men?*

- It seemed uncomfortable at first, I had doubts and thought it wasn't going to work out but I want to prove that we ladies/woman can do what men/boys do. So for me working in this sort of environment is quite challenging in a good way. Girls shouldn't be afraid to push their limits and do more outside of their comfort zone

4. *How is your progress at work?*

- I am starting to understand the purpose of the job and what it does to EPC as a whole and of course the people of Samoa. In the beginning there was a struggle but I've work my way out of it and gained more confidence to work. I also rely on the support of my supervisors, they have been really helpful

5. *Do you feel your professional growth is being stalled because you are a woman?*

- No I do not. That's just negative thinking. I believe there is more I can do and it will come with time. At the moment, I am taking it step by step as there is a lot to learn and know about the job. It is very demanding and I need to be on top of everything and learn as much as I can

6. *What is EPC like as work place for female technical workers? Does it provide the necessary support? What does it need to do to improve?*

- EPC is a good organization to work in; it is a good working place for female technical workers as well. Judging from my experience so far it does provide the necessary support that we need for doing the job. For example my role requires me to work night shifts and EPC has been very accommodating. They have rostered me to come in at the daytime only if it is a bit of an issue for me to work at night. The fact that they do consider this makes me very comfortable and appreciative.

7. *What was the general reaction from friends, families, village members, church members when they found out that you work amongst men?*

- Well there were some people that didn't agree. However my parents did encourage me to just go for it because as the saying goes, "we don't learn and gain strength without taking risks". My parents were really encouraging so I took up the advice and went for it. Taking risks is a good thing, because you'll learn from it, and I am young too, so I guess I can afford to take those risks.

8. *Do you feel sometimes you are being patronized, talked down to or not listened to because you are a woman at work?*

- It does happens a lot in other places that I have association with, but since I started here at EPC no one has ever been like that, I think because there are different types of people, those who think they can do it all and those who think more about others and understand that it is about the work and not about their individual egos.

9. *Have you ever been uncomfortable at work due to a comment a male colleague said? If so, what did you do?*

- Well we are all matured enough to understand the difference between a joke and a backlash. It didn't happen to me but I know it happens to others elsewhere, all I can say if someone ever said something rude or nasty, it's a must to report it and I will not be scared to communicate that sort of behaviour to the top management. It will help everyone if we are to sort the situation out immediately and I will take a stance, if it ever occurs.

10. *Are there any contributing factors which could be the reasons why women in general do not pursue technical jobs?*

- We females tend to put our family's well-being first in everything; I meant that we always have that instinct feeling that we second thought or tend to over think everything we do. But it shouldn't matter if we want to pursue something different, because we won't learn and experience life without taking a few risks. I think that's mostly the top reason why we second thought everything; it is the concern about our well-being and those of our loved ones. So we tend to go for jobs that will not take us away from our homes for a long time or those that do not put us in hazardous positions. I guess it is that motherly gene if there is such a thing.

11. *How would you change the perception that technical work is for men?*

- Education, education and awareness. Also, actually doing it and people seeing it. Need to change old perceptions that certain jobs are only good of a specific gender. If men can do our jobs then there is a possibility that we females can do what they do also. So there's no such thing like this is a man's job and that is a woman's job. We are all in it together

12. *What should EPC do to attract more women into technical roles?*

- I think they should start recruiting more females and help them settle into their work environments. Even if it takes a bit more effort and resources to create that environment then by all means do it. Once that environment has been created and consolidated everything else falls into place. And also stop thinking that "oh it's a female, we have never had one in this position before". Those old time prejudices should be stopped and ensure never to surface again. Any change has to start from somewhere.