

Connecting the Dots

Stories of Change: Women in Local Government

Political power for positive change

Summary

Cllr Annie Kapandula Kalamatila, Lufwanyama District, Zambia

Project participation: Women in Local Government network

Lufwanyama District, the largest district in Zambia, is also one of the poorest but with great potential thanks to its natural resources. After a five-year term as a councillor, Annie Kapandula has fought prejudice to become the first female mayor of the district. Through the Connecting the Dots project she has learned how to raise her profile and stand her ground. She now has big plans for making improvements to education, health, unemployment and infrastructure to bring about positive change.

Background

From 2016 until early 2021, Annie Kapandula Kalamatila was a ward councillor for Kansoka Ward, one of 20 wards in Lufwanyama District, the largest district in Zambia with an area of more than eleven thousand square kilometers.

She has always been keen to help bring about change to improve the lives of local people. Previously she had run a charity which received and distributed donations - such as desks, chairs, and sewing machines - from abroad. While there, she was invited by one of the major NGO donors, Crossroads International, to go to its Hong Kong headquarters as a volunteer. This was a life changer for her. After learning about effective leadership and management during her three month stay, she returned home determined to go into politics to have a bigger capacity to influence change. She realised that by standing for election she could make a difference to improve the lives of local people. and so, backed by her family and party, she became the first female to stand for council in the district.

“I set out to make a change way before 2016 elections when I became a councillor. I was involved with my husband in running a charity called MPM. In this organisation we would lobby for donations from abroad which we would distribute to needy people of Kalulushi and Lufwanyama District. We would receive 40 and 20 feet containers from Australia and Hong Kong which would contain school desks and chairs, clothes, sewing machines etc and other things that could improve the lives of people,” said Annie.

Aims

Recognising the many challenges the district faced in areas such as education, roads and other infrastructure, and youth unemployment, when her term as councillor ended Annie took the next step and decided to stand to become mayor for the Lufwanyama

District in the 2021 elections.

However, for Annie running for mayor was not an easy challenge: she had to fight to be adopted as her party's candidate as many men were reluctant to see a woman candidate despite her strong credentials, and there was some corruption in the process. Annie realised that she needed support in campaigning and publicity as well as financial help to get her campaign off the ground.

'Despite worldwide calls to increased female participation at all levels of governance, I found it was more rhetoric than practice by the stakeholders. As a female it was extremely difficult to get adopted as a candidate it because of so much corruption amongst the men. I stood my ground, and offered no bribes, but I kept going to our party's headquarters to seek assurance that I would be adopted no matter how much the men fought it,' she noted.

How the CtD project has helped

Getting involved in the Connecting the Dots project helped Annie understand the need to raise her profile, and how she could do this via means such as social media and in the community.

She also needed money to help support her campaign become mayor: money to travel for campaigns and for publicity materials. Political supporters and women in the WILGN offered moral and financial help in reaching her goal.

"Through the Connecting the Dots Project, I learned the need for and use of profiling yourself through the various social media and in the community. This has brought a new sense of hope in the district. I now stand in the corridors of power - power to effect positive change for my people in the district.

Impact

Annie won the mayoral election with a landslide victory, amassing almost 15,000 votes against her opponent's 6000 votes. Annie became the first ever female mayor of Lufwanyama District.

As the world's largest producer of emeralds, Lufwanyama District is potentially the richest district in the country, and has exceptionally good arable land supplied by several rivers. But despite this, the district is one of the poorest in the country. with many people living in abject poverty and a lack of schools. Mayor Annie Kapandula wants to tackle this and improve living standards, making it a priority to improve education for young people, to bring down the high levels of youth unemployment, and to improve infrastructure to allow services and the economy to function better.

"Many kids fail to attend school and others, particularly girls, drop out of education due to the distance they would have travel. The few schools which are available are in such deplorable state that they are incapable of providing a conducive learning environment," she said.

“The clinics and health posts are equally far apart and this proves to be a challenge when emergencies occur. The majority of the roads in the district are so terrible, presenting a huge challenge for farmers and other sectors relying on transportation.”

But Annie plans to change all this. She intends to bring together all the ward councillors and engage other local stakeholders to identify the most pressing problems and look at how they can be addressed.

“With the potential that our district presents, I would like to change the narrative by identifying and listing all problems that exist in the district, using my 20 ward councillors and then engaging all relevant stakeholders - the local council, government, NGOs and others - to try to find solutions.”

“I feel indebted to the Jo Cox Connecting the Dots project and the population of Lufwanyama; for me the real race has just begun.

Looking ahead

Annie says that she has learned that it pays to be a fighter: it is possible to change the status quo if people are willing to stand up and be willing to pay the price. She says that even corruption can be overcome by those who are really genuine.

With fewer women adopted to run for council in 2021 than in 2016, Annie has highlighted the need to encourage more women to stand and get adopted for future local elections. One of the things she has learned from the Connecting the Dots project is how the media and various platforms can be used as a tool for advocacy to get more women included in the adoption process in future.

