

Connecting the dots

Stories of change: Women in Local Government

Whole community approach to achieving 50-50

Summary

Elizabeth Mulenga Nachisambwe, community activist, Kapiri Mposhi district, Zambia

Project involvement: Women in Local Government network and workshops

Elizabeth Nachisambwe has been politically active in her community for many years. Frustrated at the lack of progress on gender issues, she joined the Connecting the Dots project which has reinvigorated her vision for gender equality and led her to the a whole community approach to ensure that men as well as women understand their rights and responsibilities and work towards 50-50 per cent representation.

Background

Sixty-year-old Elizabeth Mulenga Nachinsambwe from Kapiri Mposhi district, Zambia, is a keen gender activist. Elizabeth served as a councillor on the local council for 15 years from 2006 to 2021 for Chang'ondo ward, Kapiri Mposhi district. She has been branch chairperson, then ward chairperson and is now constituency chairperson for her party.

Educated up to tertiary level, Elizabeth is a former chairperson for a programme on malnutrition from 1995 to 1998. Married with one daughter and two granddaughters, Elizabeth is also a peasant farmer and auto-motive electrician.

As a female community leader, Elizabeth has tried to foster gender development in the community by means of encouraging women workplace representatives, an officer from each of the government line ministries in the area, and having women's representation in all the zones of her ward, using local resources, local people and government funding through the local councils, as well lobbying by stakeholders.

Aims

With her long experience in the community, Elizabeth wants to continue as a gender advocate and work towards breaking down the barriers on gender equality, and to remove the obstacles that are slowing down progress on gender equality in politics and the workplace. She says that the commitment of making workplaces, more fair and equitable must be put into practice, and there needs to be a push for 50 per cent representation of women. Elizabeth joined the Connecting the Dots project to help her take forward these aims.

"I am trying to do this because the situation now is that gender equality is not being achieved and there is not a fair representation of women in local

governance and other working places, I would want a 50/50 per cent threshold participation,” emphasises Elizabeth.

“This is impacting our situation in the community as women: we are the majority but we do not support each another when it comes to choosing local leadership which we must do if we are to achieve the goal of gender equality,” she says.

How the CtD project has helped

Elizabeth says that the Connecting the Dots project has helped her to focus on what needs to be done and how to reach out for the community to ensure they receive their share of the national cake in terms of service delivery. Not only did she benefit from the training and the workshops which she attended, but she was also able to use her own experience to mentor other women to participate in local leadership and pursue other avenues.

“I am very happy with the knowledge I have acquired from the Connecting the Dots project,” says Elizabeth.

My experience and training thanks to organisations such as Gender Links and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum has helped me in mind, body and spirit; I have enjoyed the process of my journey to foster development in our communities.

Impact

Involvement in the project has changed Elizabeth’s life and the lives of those in the community who she has been helping to develop. She is not only mentoring women, but has decided to mentor young men who, she points out, are the ones who need to change to make a change in society as women are often reluctant to say anything about issues such as gender violence, lack of finances, or being prevented to participate in elections.

“Gender-based violence and discrimination costs every one. So I address gender equality by working with the entire community,” explains Elizabeth.

Elizabeth says that participation in the conferences and workshops has helped her understand the vision for gender equality, and aspire to a world in which women and men have equal rights under the law, full enjoyment of their human rights. and participation in all decision-making leadership.

