

Connecting the dots

Stories of change: Women in Local Government

Doing it for themselves

Summary

Cllr Elizabeth Twiggy Mulenga, local councillor and business woman, Luanshya, Zambia

Project involvement: Women in Local Government network and mentor

Community-minded Cllr Elizabeth Mulenga has been a councillor for ten years, deputy mayor and leader of her political party as well as being a teacher and running her own business. A strong voice on women's issues, Elizabeth sees good leadership as key to promoting local economic development and tackling poverty through mobilising people to change things for themselves. Thanks to the Connecting the Dots project, she is now getting more young women into politics and changing traditional attitudes to the roles of men and women and has helped many families become more prosperous.

Background

Elizabeth Twiggy Mulenga is an experienced businesswoman, teacher and active community leader in Luanshya, Zambia, a copperbelt district. A councillor for more than a decade, she is one of two women councillors in Luanshya district, and was deputy mayor from 2014-2016 and has been party leader since 2011. She has been a strong voice on women's issues, and getting women recognised

Thanks to a strong education, Elizabeth started her career teaching in primary and secondary schools. As a businesswoman she runs a small farm, producing goods for the local community. Married with six grown-up children, she has still found time for community work, organising small farmers to win ward development funds and developing community farming. Elizabeth is passionate about mobilising people to change their own lives for the better.

Aims

As a councillor, Elizabeth saw the many challenges the community was facing and wanted to promote the economic development of the district, in particular to tackle the lack of jobs for young people.

As a district where people depend on farming, one of the big issues was the high cost of fertiliser. Another was that many people seeking an income go into illegal mining activities, endangering their own health and the community.

When deputy mayor, she spearheaded the development of farming cooperatives to help farmers reduce the cost of fertiliser and other farming inputs, and engaged young people in grass cutting and drainage for which they would receive a small amount of money in payment.

Recognising that good leadership is essential in tackling some of the challenges, Elizabeth wanted to change the traditional mindset that fosters the idea that only males are supposed to lead and boost the confidence of other women to take up leadership positions. She wanted to find a way to improve the mindset of males and develop leadership qualities of females and saw getting involved in the Connecting the Dots project a stepping stone to do this.

“Working in communities is never easy at all. Lack of resources is the major pitfall that we always encounter,” said Elizabeth.

But Elizabeth says that there is a lot of community spirit and willingness if the right leaders are there to harness this, and there is plenty of skilled labour amongst the community whose skills could earn incomes and get them out of poverty.

“Community members are available and willing to work to develop their communities. What they need are leaders to mobilise them and assist them with resources in addition to materials that are available locally.”

How the CtD project has helped

Elizabeth says that communities are very keen to work voluntarily but need the resources and leadership. The Connecting the Dots capacity building programme helped her to grow personally, and to learn to mentor young women to encourage them to take an interest in politics. Some of the new skills she has learned have helped her attain and hold one of the highest positions in her party and it has helped her to contribute to the community even more.

Impact

Elizabeth’s community work, helping people understand the importance of doing work for themselves and not waiting for someone else to do it for them, has changed their lives. For instance, by providing leadership and organising people to work together to purchase fertiliser they have reduced the cost, and working on something for themselves has led to them accessing FISP and ward development funds in turn creating more jobs, especially for young people. People in the community have changed their lives for themselves.

Overseeing people working on the farms, Elizabeth says that people have now started taking care of the farms themselves, putting food on the table and giving them a sense of belonging. This has had a further positive impact in reducing vandalism of property in the community.

“I managed to help a lot of families in the community to have food on the table and have changed their mind on farming.

“The work we have done has given me a sense of fulfilment and great joy. There is a lot of skilled labour in the communities and many of them were spending time either sitting at home or taking alcohol in bars. We came up with ideas and ways that can assist community members to have an income

at the household level,” says Elizabeth.

Looking ahead

Elizabeth would like to see more ways of engaging more community members. She says it is important to involve men as well as women and young people as they are part of the community and their skills are needed, as well as changing their mindsets..

