

Connecting the dots

Stories of change: Young Women in Local Government

Encouraging young people to participate in politics

Summary

Kaswela Mwamba, Socio-Economic Planner, Kasama Municipal Council, Zambia

Project involvement: Young Women in Local Government network and workshops

Not yet 30, Kaswela Mwamba has considerable experience in local government and development and is passionate about local government, youth and gender. Now elected as Chair of the Young Women in Local Government Network, she is a key figure in motivating other young people to get involved in local government and take up leadership roles.

Background

Kaswela Mwamba has been working in local government for more than seven years, starting as a young officer in the newly created District of Limulunga in western province soon after graduating. Since then her career has developed and she is now a socio-economic planner for Kasama Municipal Council where she has experience in implementing various socio-economic programmes for the local authority, and in working with development partners such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and European Union.

Through working with various stakeholders Kaswela has gained considerable expertise in governance, gender, water and sanitation and climate change and is now serving as a Socio-Economist and Gender Specialist on a government project.

“My life has been very interesting, filled with ups and downs. Having lost both my parents at a young age, I have always been driven to push myself to work hard in all areas of my life. I was privileged to join local government just after graduating from the University of Zambia and have enjoyed growing my career,” says Kaswela

“For many years, lack of professional progression was very discouraging and affected me negatively. I decided to change my mindset and focus on various development programmes. Looking back at the years where I thought I had a lack of progression, actually I gained a lot of knowledge and experience in many development areas.

Aims

Kaswela is passionate about local government and gender. She wants to see

more young people, especially young women, taking on positions of power and spearheading development in their communities.

Kaswela became involved in the Connecting the Dots project to try to change the narrative for young people - young people are the future, they need to be pushed to take up various opportunities now and not wait until tomorrow.

“Many youths do not concern themselves with matters such as local governance and gender. By working with the projects I am hoping that many young people rise up to the challenge and begin to participate in service delivery, and take up mentorship and leadership opportunities.”

How the CtD project has helped

The Connecting the Dots project has provided financial, material and moral support for Kaswela and colleagues to implement various activities that have had a positive impact on young people and women in Kasama District and beyond.

Kaswela has taken every opportunity to be involved in project activities, though she found that implementation of some project activities called for a lot of commitment and patience when working in group dynamics.

Being part of the Young Women in Local Government network has not only allowed Kaswela to work with young people in her local district, but she has also been able to interact with people from different walks of life within Zambia and Southern Africa.

Impact

Kaswela was elected as the Chairperson for the Young Women in Local Government network. This has enabled her to develop and improve her leadership skills and equipped her with more knowledge on governance, gender matters and entrepreneurship.

Through this network and other networks including Women in Local Economic Development, and mentorship opportunities, Kaswela has been a key figure in motivating many young people to take up leadership roles, and to grow their businesses.

“The project has greatly contributed towards improving the capacity of local authorities to provide gender responsive service delivery and encourage the participation of young people in local governance,” she commented.

“I have had a great experience with the Jo Cox Connecting the Dots Project and one key thing I have learned is to take advantage of every opportunity that comes my way,” said Kaswela.

“Through the project I have realised the delight I derive from seeing other young people grow and take up various roles in their organisations and communities,’ she added.

Looking forward

Kaswela would like to see more support for young women that want to take up political leadership roles in the form of capacity building. She points to the low participation of women in the recent local government elections in Zambia in 2021 despite many young women having shown an interest in standing.

“Very few women participated in the recent elections in the country, I believe many young women who are part of the YWLG were interested in taking up positions but did not do so because they may have lacked the encouragement and didn’t know how to do so,” she said.

