

Connecting the dots

Stories of change: Women in Local Economic Development

Cutting her cloth and costs

Summary

Nombuso Dlamini, entrepreneur, Hlathikhulu, Eswatini

Project involvement: Women in Local Economic Development capacity building and networking

Learning the principles of managing a business through the Connecting the Dots project has not only helped Nombuso Dlamini to take a more professional approach and rationalise and grow her own dressmaking business, but by being involved in the WLED network she is now an influencer and teacher for young people in the area who want to start up in business.

Background and aims

Mrs Nombuso Siphilile Dlamini Lakhumalo from the town of Hlathikhulu was nominated by the town board from Hlathikhulu, to be part of the Connecting the Dots project, with young entrepreneurs from Gender Links to learn more about business and develop her business skills.

Nombuso has a dressmaking business, Temahlubi dressmaking and design; she is also a hawker.

How the CtD project has helped

Nombusa attended the Connecting the Dots training in Piggs Peak for two years. Learning about business management has completely changed her attitude to business: she had previously approached it as a joke, not thinking that she was doing a good job, but the skills she has learned have given her a fresh professional outlook to running her business.

Learning how to keep business books and all the records of the business was a revelation for Nombusa. By recording the incomes and expenditures she was able to see the amount of work she does and also the amount of money wasted. Having a better understanding of the cash flow, she has learned not to waste money. She now paying herself a wage rather than just spending money from the business whenever she wanted. By doing this she found that she had money to restock or make new clothes.

'I used to just spend money. If the kids needed anything I would just take money from the business. At the end of the month I would find that I did not have enough money though I was the one wasting it. Learning about bookkeeping really helped me and I started spending less of the money. I learned to pay myself at the end of the month and then I get to take care of

my home, take care of my kids and also have money to restock which is more than I wasted,” explained Nombusa.

Nombusa also learned about ways of cutting costs and using time more efficiently. Her mentor Bertha helped her reevaluate her monthly trips to Johannesburg, and that she could save a lot of money if she saved up the money to stock up enough for four months and only make one trip every four months. This was particularly useful during the Covid-19 pandemic as it reduced her risk from travelling.

Nombusa also learned about customer relations and how to communicate with customers, and how to respect and treat them and handle any complaints. She now feels that she can deal with any situations and handle any problems better.

“The customer is always right. Even when a customer comes back with a piece of clothing saying you didn’t make it right, you didn’t do it the way they asked, I should be patient with them because I need the customer to pay me. I should do what they are asking for. I should be humble and respect my customers, even when I feel upset we didn’t handle things well.” Nombusa noted.

“I learned a lot from our mentor. This has helped me to grow in my business. Now I am able to educate my kids in any school of my choice or their choice. And I am able to stock up accordingly,” said Nombusa.

“I benefitted a lot. I don’t know how to thank them. I have also learned that it is important to help others in the community.

Impact

Nombuso has not only found benefits for her own business but is also able to help others in different ways. For example, she gives the pieces of fabric that are left over to other women for free so that they can also make a living. Some use the fabrics to make beautiful mats, other women use the fabrics to make earrings.

She has also helped others to understand the importance of bookkeeping for their businesses, such as some of the small scale businesses selling fruit and vegetables.

“Those who I have taught are now grateful, they can now see the amount of work they put in. Even if they have spent some of the money but they can see how they are working. When you do the end of the month calculations you can see how much you have made and how much you have wasted. This has helped enormously,” said Nombusa.

“It has helped me a lot to know that I can help other people start their own businesses,” she explained.

“Sometimes we run short of money while we wish to grow businesses, but we

are able to survive, we do not starve, and our families do not go unclothed.
We are now the breadwinners in our home.”

