

Connecting the Dots

Stories of change: Women in Local Economic Development

Delivering catering services differently

Summary

Priscilla Mutale, entrepreneur, Kasama district, Zambia

Project participation: Capacity building workshops, Women in Local Economic Development Network and mentoring

Priscilla Mutale had just started her own catering business when Covid struck, resulting in a big impact on customer numbers and income. Not to be deterred, Priscilla took the opportunity to join the WLED network and attend the Connecting the Dots capacity building workshops. By learning how to diversity her offer to customers, Priscilla has been inspired to expand her food business, start selling online and open a catering school to help unemployed young people to learn new skills. Going from strength to strength, she has now built her own restaurant and shops to offer more services and employment to local people.

Background

Priscilla Chisanga Mutale from Kasama district in the Northern Province of Zambia has a background in hotels and catering. After studying at Evelyn Hone College in Kasama, she gained two years of experience working at the Intercontinental Hotel from 1999 to 2001. Having had an ambition to set up her own business in catering, decoration, construction and events, she had just embarked on the journey to do this when she heard about the Connecting the Dots project and how it could help her develop and improve her business.

Aims

In Kasama many young people leave secondary school with no trade or skill to enable them earn an income and no prospect of further learning due to scarcity of higher learning institutions within the district. Priscilla was hoping she could offer training to these young people by diversifying her business and opening up a catering school. This would not only build her own business capacity but it would also help young people who may not have not much to do to find a focus and improve their skills.

The food business was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the restrictions resulting in a reduction in the number of customers and thus income for the business. Priscilla wanted ideas on how to meet this challenge to keep the business profitable.

“I wanted things to be different so that people could freely buy or order food or any type or merchandise online, making it easy to access business in these

challenging times,” explained Priscilla.

Priscilla’s wanted to increase her business knowledge and skills. Her goals in attending the Connecting the Dots capacity building workshops were two-fold: to open a catering school and to create an online service in response to Covid-19.

How the CtD project has helped

Through the workshop training, Priscilla learned about how to diversify her offer, how she could improve her record keeping and how to improve her financial management and planning.

Using some of her new skills, Priscilla set about making changes to her business, first of all approaching lending institutions to provide funding so as to develop and improve on her existing strategies. A loan from a financial institution made a big difference and had a significant impact on her business. She was able to diversify the variety of food and services she offered with a resulting increase in her customer base.

Being part of the WLED network, Priscilla learned ideas on how she could respond to the reduction in face-to-face trading by taking things online. She decided that she wanted to change things to be able to deliver her services differently. She set up a web-based service for people to order her food and merchandise online.

“In the beginning my journey was not easy as I didn’t have a variety of food to offer my customers so the customer base was not big enough to support the business. I also did not have enough money to fund my business due to unexpected losses owing to poor record keeping and financial management,” said Priscilla.

Impact

Thanks to her new business acumen and confidence, Priscilla’s business has gone from strength to strength and changed her life for the better. It has also had a positive impact on the lives of others thanks to the increased employment she has provided.

From her initial food business, she then built her own restaurant. Following this she has been able to build five houses and two shops, creating much-needed employment in the catering and construction industries.

“This experience has been very empowering in the most amazing and positive way. I feel more confident to keep doing what I do after the interaction I have had with the Connecting the Dots project,” said Priscilla.

“The capacity building and mentorship sessions provided me with insights on how to improve my business and I have been able to put these into practice.”

Lessons learned

Priscilla says that she has have learned that hard work pays off, and people need to have confidence in themselves to achieve what they set out to do. She would like to see more women benefit from training in business to help them develop their careers and businesses.

