

Connecting the dots

Stories of change: Young Women in Local Government

A voice for young people

Summary

Thokozile Penjani Kapembwa, Environmental Planner, Rufunsa District Council, Zambia

Project involvement: Young Women in Local Government network and capacity development

When Thokozile Kapembwa joined Rufunsa District Council she saw that young people did not have any say and there were no avenues to encourage young people to get involved in local governance. The new skills she has learned through the Connecting the Dots project has helped her find her voice and become an advocate for young people, introducing a programme to include young people and setting up a junior council with a junior mayor that has become a model for other districts.

Background

Thokozile Kapembwa is a young woman working in local government, currently working in the planning department of Rufunsa district council as an environmental planner.

When she first started working in local government, Thokozile felt some frustration when she was told not to speak unless you are spoken to in meetings, thus disregarding any ideas she or other young people had. She found this a particular challenge as it was different to where she had previously worked as an intern, where the CEO required everyone's participation.

Aims

Thokozile wanted to change the mindset that led to young people being sidelined and start including youths in decision making. Being in management she shared her ideas with her managers and received some encouragement but needed some support to take things forward.

One proposal that Thokozile had put together was for local youths to participate in a programme of activities to encourage young people's participation in governance. This included an idea to elect a junior mayor who will be able to attend all council meetings. Thokozile's immediate supervisor and council secretary were been very helpful, but the project needed funding.

How the CtD project has helped

Being part of the Young Women in Local Government Network and Enhancing

Local Government Capacity for Development Project has helped Thokozile to develop her interpersonal and leadership skills. Networking with other young people and women from different districts helped her learn new things and gave her ideas for accessing funding to take forward her ideas to improve on youth participation in decision making and advocacy for human rights.

“I feel proud as having been part of the project; the lessonsI learned triggered the idea of soliciting funding to improve on youth participation.Networking with other youths and women from different districts helped me learn new things and boosted my spirits to new heights,” said Thokozile.

“The project has broadened my perspective on involvement of youths in decision making and how, with guidance and proper mentorship, one can reach greater heights. Capacity building and mentorship from well-seasoned women has shaped me to be a leader, teaching me how to embrace negative comments and different personalities.”

Impact

Thokozile’s work has led to a change in attitude and allowed the introduction of activities that have helped to bring in the ideas and opinions of other young colleagues both within the office and in the council’s own decision making. The setting up of a Junior Council and and junior mayor has been a great success and is now a model for other districts to hear the voice of young people.

