

Thelma's Triumph: Inspiring Health and Hope in Mukuba Village



A cooking demonstration in Zambia. | Photo © iDE

In Mukuba Village in Zambia, Thelma Nsange is a beacon of hope within her savings group, especially for pregnant women and lactating mothers. At 34, this single mother holds a diploma in social work and has been a catalyst for healthier lives in her community. When the opportunity arose to become a nutrition and WASH champion, she seized it with fervor to learn how families can eat a more nutritious diet and keep their children healthy. Thelma's journey began when she witnessed the struggles of mothers facing malnutrition.

"I saw too many women suffering and not eating a diverse diet," she recalls. Determined to make a difference, she took on the Nutrition and WASH champion role and attended training organized by the Transforming Lives team for new champions.

Every two weeks, Thelma gathers her team members to share essential knowledge about nutrition and WASH. Initially, she faced challenges as many people were disinterested. However, after the first session, curiosity sparked, and participation grew. The group particularly enjoyed the cooking demonstrations, where they learned new food preparation techniques. Members felt "empowered to prepare nutritious meals and maintain a clean environment." Many adopted the slogan "Nutrition is about caring for ourselves and our surroundings." Thelma's team, once small and hesitant, has grown into a supportive and proud community.

When Thelma became a champion, she learned of keyhole gardens—small, circular raised gardens with built-in spaces for composting that can enrich poor soil and thrive in arid climates. Inspired, she created her own, a blessing given the community's scarce water supply. Her initiative served as an inspiration for others, as one of her team members started her own keyhole garden, and five more women are planning to do the same. Thelma now enjoys a variety of vegetables daily, including mustard spinach, onions, and rape.

When Thelma began her nutrition and WASH lessons, three members of her group were pregnant. She encouraged them to consume diverse, nutritious meals. "I know pregnancy hormones can make someone less inclined to eat healthily," she says. "But I always urge pregnant women to include foods from all six food groups to stay healthy." So far, one member has given birth. Thelma continues to support lactating mothers, advising them to eat a nutritious diet, increase meal frequency, and exclusively breastfeed their babies for the first six months and continuing through their child's second birthday.

Looking ahead, Thelma dreams of helping more people in her group start small businesses. She believes financial stability is crucial for improving nutrition and WASH outcomes at both the household and community levels. The group's plans for the future are ambitious and exciting, fostering a sense of optimism and anticipation for what's to come.



Nutrition and WASH champions in Zambia. | Photo © iDE