Mutetelenu “Muka” Kalama is a force of nature, which is quite apt, as climate change and environmental sustainability has been the driving force behind her activism. “My journey started in 2010, when I became a Climate Change Child Ambassador for UNICEF in Zambia.” Part of the programme included training on how to use radio as a communication and advocacy platform, whereby young people could raise awareness on important issues like climate change and HIV prevention. Muka, as she prefers to be called, went onto become a facilitator and trainer within the UN programme, where she helped initiate projects on tree planting and environmental dialogues, as well as education projects focused on HIV prevention.

After 8 years though, Muka knew that she needed another challenge, so she and four of her friends Josephine Namakau Pumulo, Luckson Mwale and Luyando Katenda, decided to use their talents and experience and create something homegrown. Buoyed by their massive dream to connect girls to change and with minimal funding, Muka and four of her closest friends started the Agents of Change Foundation (ACF) in 2013. “One of the biggest challenges in Zambia for young people remains access. When we started the Agents of Change we knew that we wanted to create a platform that would give other less privileged young people an opportunity to learn, find their voice and use the platform to gain access to a new world of opportunities.” The organisation allows young people to become leaders in their communities through radio. Targeting 13 to 18 year-olds, ACF offers training in basic journalism and social media skills, leadership development, television and radio story production, as well as advocacy training in climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights. “Once they have completed our training, they then qualify to become youth reporters. But we still need to ensure that they gain valuable practical experience.” ACF has entered into partnerships with 5 national radio stations across Zambia, where the youth journalists are given practical application training. This approach is a win-win scenario for both the radio stations and ACF. The radio station is able to tap into the youthful voices and stories that the young journalists bring to the programming and their large youth audiences, while ACF is able to train up to 20 young people at a time per radio station.” Since its inception the organisation has trained over 150 youth reporters across the country.

Many of the young people that have been given the opportunity to gain much needed training and experience, in a country where the majority of young people are unemployed or not in meaningful employment, have gone onto carving out successful media careers, with others representing the country at regional and international forums, and others achieving national and international accolades for their work and advocacy in Climate change and SRHR. “We are creating different pathways that young people can take towards creating the future that they want to see for themselves. Young people in Zambia are taking over and they are leading the conversations and tackling the real issues that they feel is important to them.” Muka says she’s especially inspired by young women who, since participating in the ACF programme, are addressing large crowds, or confidently talking to office bearers, policy makers and leaders and they are holding their own. “We have changed the voices of young people and they are creating waves of change that will impact generations to come.”
The impact of ACF’s work is now being recognised and celebrated. The organisation has received awards from ZEMA, the Zambia Environmental Management Agency and the National Youth Development Council. They were even featured on CNNs African Voices last year, as a showcase of African voices creating opportunities for change. As the Executive Director and one of the main drivers behind ACF, Muka’s incredible work was recognised by the Women Economic Forum in 2018, as a “Young woman creating a better place for others”. In the same year, she was named as one of the Top 100 Young woman influencers in SADC, for her work in climate change and SRHR activism. Muka believes that leaders like her and the founders of ACF need to show young women in particular that they can dream big dreams and reach for the stars, because young people are the power for change. “I am always encouraging young people to chase their dreams because no one is going to hand it to you on a silver platter. You have to go out there and make connections, look for ideas and opportunities and then grab them with both hands, so that you are in control and can achieve your dreams.”

One of the initiatives that ACF that focuses on empowering young women is the Girls Connect programme launched during 16 Days of Activism against gender based violence in 2018. It was born out of the desire to put an end to any and all forms of violence that young women and girls are subjected to. The programme is run on a quarterly basis and brings together young female champions from different backgrounds, who are themselves trailblazers in their own communities. The leadership training is then backed up by connecting the young women to mentors, who come from different sectors in Zambia and who can share their experiences and offer personalised advice. “One of things that we have found young women need, is just to be able to talk to someone who they admire and look up to, and who is able to give them practical assistance on how to overcome challenges and show them a pathway towards success.” For Muka it’s about changing the narrative of female success and what that looks like. In the month of March, that celebrates International Women’s Day, ACFs work on girl leadership is an important building block towards creating Generation Equality. For those young women who are interested in participating, Muka advises young women to follow their Facebook page to see when the next training workshop will be held and anyone who wants to participate as a mentor is welcome to contact the organisation.

#FRIDAYYOUTHACTIVIST  #CONNECTINGGIRLSTOCHANGE  #SAT4YOUTH  

www.satregional.org  SATregional  @SRHRAfricaTrust
The Agents Of Change Foundation Zambia is an international passionate youth led foundation that is rooted in love, voluntarism and good core values of young people coming together to ripen the potential of fellow young people as agents of change in their communities and beyond as well as help them realise how much they are worth in the society. The foundation aims at achieving this through the provision of Radio training and storytelling skills thereby tackling HIV/AIDS prevention, Environmental Sustainability, Human Rights as well as other issues of concern.

Learn more about Agents of Change Foundation:

- Facebook: @Agents of Change Foundation Zambia
- Instagram: @Agents of Change Zambia