

TANZANIA

# A Gender Champion Emerges in Chamwino

by E. Baragon



*Ms. Joanitha Kahangwa and Ms. Somoe Khamis, JP REWEE's Gender Champions showing their certificates of Honor from Chamwino District Council in recognition of their contributions*

Joanitha Kahangwa, a widowed mother of five, is a respected entrepreneur and community leader in Wilunze village, Manchali Ward – Chamwino District Council. She runs a restaurant and catering business, enabling her to support her children and extended family. She also serves on the Manchali Secondary School Board and is a Gender Champion and influential local leader.

But Joanitha is somewhat exceptional in her village.

This is because she resides in a community where women are often excluded from decision-making and leadership roles. Poverty, limited resources, and gender-based violence are common challenges for women in the area. Many men oppose women's involvement in business, sometimes exploit jointly owned assets without women's consent, or drive them from their homes, leaving them without support. But change is underway.

Through the Tanzania Women Chamber of Commerce (TWCC) and UN Women's Joint Programme on Accelerating Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE), Joanitha has received training in gender equality and social inclusion. Using RESPECT and SASA tools, she now acts as a mentor to women and youth aspiring to start and grow their own businesses.

**' I have learned how to be confident in  
what I am doing as it is not an easy task'**

"I was able to understand how important it is to help my fellow women fight GBV and other forms of discrimination," says Joanitha. "I feel proud that I can raise awareness and people can understand what I am sharing with them. I have become a champion in my community and now I receive many cases and people even visit my home seeking my support."

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As a dedicated Gender Champion and respected community leader in Manchali, Joanitha continues to inspire and empower those around her through tireless advocacy for gender equality and community development. Through her work in the community, Joanitha is exposed to and well-versed on the challenges people are facing in her community. Joanitha Kahangwa attributes a lot of the confidence she has gained to the leadership, GBV and gender equality trainings she received as well as the mentorship sessions.

Her unwavering commitment to uplifting women and girls has earned her widespread respect and recognition culminating in a special honour from the community and the local government. This year, during the Commemoration of the International Women's Day, Joanitha was recognized as a Champion in supporting women, youth, and people with disabilities in Chamwino District.

The recognition from the Chamwino District Council during the commemoration of International Women's Day is a testament to her impactful work and the positive transformation she has brought to Chamwino district. Receiving a certificate of appreciation, Joanitha expressed gratitude for the support from the community and reaffirmed her commitment to continue advocating for gender justice.

Her leadership in Manchali has also been instrumental in mobilizing community members to challenge harmful gender norms, support survivors of gender-based violence, and foster inclusive participation in local decision-making processes. Joanitha's efforts have contributed to a notable shift in attitudes within the community, with more women actively participating in village meetings and assuming leadership roles.

However, the confidence she has gained through her work with JP RWEE and the spirit of supporting and helping others is what gives her the energy to continue. She feels and knows she is making a difference.

Joanitha Kahangwa's story is a powerful reminder that local leadership matters. Her journey demonstrates that with passion, dedication, and community support, one person can make a lasting difference.

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